

Series Title: *Le Storie Del Sole e Dalla Luna*
(Stories of the Sun and the Moon)
Book V: *I Fuchi e Fiorisce*
(Drones and Blooms)
Author: D. Sanders
Chapter I - "Loneliness"

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Steffan watched his only son sitting alone in the corner reading a book. His five sisters out by the lake with Mali. At seventeen he reminded Steffan of Mali as he'd first seen her. Fey of build, extremely beautiful and eyes that held true sadness.

"Callan, isn't there a celebration tonight for those of you who earned your robes? Aren't you going son?" Steffan asked, noticing over the years how withdrawn Callan had become, especially once he'd become a teenager.

"No Dad." Callan said quietly and Steffan stopped working on his medicines and walked over to his son wearing newly white robes.

"Why not? You earned your robes today too." Steffan asked and Callan just looked up sadly.

"You know Calanthe dad. He's still little and he tends to, you know, make a mess. If I go, it takes away from the others."

"It takes away from you too son. You know Mane told you if Calanthe is being childish you should scold him."

"Ever try scolding a God dad? It was different when I was little. Now? It's just best I don't go places where a disruption is unwelcome." Callan sighed setting down his book.

"I'm tired, I think I'll go to bed."

"It's not even dinner time yet." Steffan said and Callan smiled ruefully.

"I'm not hungry either." Callan sighed walking up the back stairs of the infirmary to an old store room that they'd turned into his bedroom so he'd have some privacy away from his younger sisters and parents to study.

Steffan sighed and rubbed the bridge of his nose and Mane appeared.

"He's such a good boy Steffan. You should be proud of him."

"I am Mane, I truly am. I'm just worried. Every year he gets worse and he won't talk to me."

“He’s lonely Steffan. You see what he goes through. You know what the problem is already. You try being the son of the Holy Flower and favorite playmate of a God. Half of the order places him on pedestals he’s afraid of falling from and the other half are either jealous or nervous around him. He picks up on their aversion and stays apart. He’s an empath you realize.”

“I know. You can never lie to Callan, he knows.”

“Which is why he never tells Calanthe ‘no’. He doesn’t want to feel Calanthe’s overly dramatic pouting when he is told ‘no’. He can go to the party, I’ve told Calanthe he’s not allowed to disturb Callan tonight.”

“I’ll tell him. Thank you.”

“No, thank you. You do more for me than you realize. It is a burden to your family, you see the side of Gods that most mortals never see.”

“Children are children. I have six of my own.” Steffan smiled and Mane chuckled.

“And be glad none of them spend as much time in perpetual childhood as mine. Even Gods grow weary chasing after children.” Mane said leaving and Steffan climbed the stairs to tell his son what Mane had said.

Steffan had to practically push his son out the door to get him to socialize and Callan walked off slowly, not looking very happy.

Jude loved the country order. He’d only arrived earlier that spring to further his studies in ancient history and with one look at the old archive he knew he could spend the rest of his young life immersed in golden knowledge. He’d grown up in the city, the King’s capitol and the large order there and while they had a grand archive, this one was far older with so many secrets. He was in heaven. Not to mention the food was glorious, the air fresh and clean, the people friendly and for a boy growing up in the fast paced city, the slow relaxing pace of country life suited him and he’d already asked the head priest to stay and apprentice himself to the old archive master.

It was rare a youth loved dusty old archives and when the Old archive master found out the lad from the city with the thirst of knowledge wanted to stay, he immediately hounded the head priest to accept the petition of residence in the order.

Jude was newly twenty, young, handsome and outgoing. He’d already made several friends among the younger priests and was sitting enjoying someone play a fiddle around the bonfire. All the newly robed priests celebrating their

graduations to higher learning. Most would leave and head to other orders to study their professions or see the world. Others would carry on here in their chosen fields.

A hush fell over the gathering like someone had thrown ice water on the revelry and the most beautiful youth Jude had ever laid eyes on stepped into the light, but not far, he seemed frozen in place. His hand clutching the robes by his heart and he looked pained. "I just wanted to congratulate everyone. I won't disturb your party." He said quietly, his soft voice sounding equally as pained.

Judging from the looks of him, he too looked to have just earned those pristine white robes that made his very dark, caramel colored skin look even darker. His white blond hair that usually only the tiniest of toddlers bore caught the firelight and his serene, large blue eyes looked about ready to cry as he just turned away again and left the gathering. A collective sigh fell across the revelers.

"Thank goodness he's not staying. He's nice enough, but five minutes and you have chaos. I'm glad I'm not a flower!" One said and another nodded.

"What does he need this for anyway? He's already favored by Mane. Doesn't he have enough?"

The banter went on and on and Jude could not believe his ears. Furthermore, the object of their conversation was still within earshot and leaving on quick feet into the darkness, obviously crying as he fled into the night.

Jude turned to one of the musicians. "Who was that?" He asked and the musician rolled his eyes.

"Mr. Perfect? You haven't heard of the Holy Flower?"

"I met her, she's a beautiful lady, what's that got to do with him?" Jude asked and the youth laughed and not too kindly.

"That's her first born. Flower Callan. Where he goes, Calanthe goes and Calanthe can wreck a room in five seconds flat. Only Callan can see him but we reap the damage if Calanthe doesn't get his way. When's he's not baby-minding the God, he's every teacher's pet and wrecking the grade curve with perfect test scores. He learned a long time ago not to bother us."

"Not to bother you? What sort of an attitude is that?" Jude said rather angry now.

"Truth man. Nobody wants to be in the same room with him. Calanthe tore up enough classrooms that Callan ended up in private lessons just so the rest of us could think."

“You’ve ostracized him! No wonder he looks so sad!”

“He was born to be a toy of a god, he’s used to it.” The youth said and Jude had had enough.

“He’s still human! By Mane’s Crown do none of you care how he feels?” Jude said storming off to find Callan.

He found him alone by the lake, sitting on a rock amidst the blooms that bore his name sobbing, his face buried in his knees. Jude’s heart ached for him and he walked over and squatted beside the youth who hurriedly wiped his eyes to hide his tears.

“Brother Callan, are you alright?” Jude asked looking up into eyes that took his breath away, the depths of sadness keen.

“I’m fine. Don’t worry over me.” Callan said wiping his eyes on his sleeves.

“They were cruel, I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be. I’m used to it.” Callan said getting up to leave when Jude reached up and laid a hand to his knee to keep Callan seated.

“You shouldn’t be. That is unfair to you, that party is as much for you as them.”

“It’s not. I am unwelcome. I know my place. Thank you for your concern though. Brother?”

“Jude.”

“Ah, my father mentioned you. The new Archive Assistant.” Callan said and Jude nodded.

“Aye. What do you plan to study now that you’ve graduated?” Jude asked, trying to make small talk, to give Callan a chance to unburden himself.

“Whatever I can read on my own. It’s too difficult to study where things might get disrupted, Excuse me Brother Jude. Forgive me, I know you are trying to be kind, I can feel your concern and I am grateful. However it is pointless to discuss things I cannot change. I belong to Calanthe, I know my place, I am just a flower in his garden and it matters not what I want and it only hurts to think about things I shall never have. Goodnight Brother Jude. I am sorry I upset your evening.” Callan said running off and Jude sat stunned his chest hurt and his eyes stung.

That was no life to live, day after day alone just waiting for a child god to use you as a toy. No friends, no future, no freedom to choose his own destiny. Jude was

angry, it wasn't fair, and he fumed where he sat when he felt a holy presence beside him and then Mane himself materialized on the boulder where Callan had sat a moment before.

"Don't give up on him Jude. My son has hurt him with his selfishness. I made a mistake not watching more closely and not seeing how often he monopolized Callan. I didn't see until it was to this state and Callan was alone. Such a treasure he is and so few see the truth. He is human, just like the next. Hurts, loves, desires, wants just like the next and he hides his own feelings, so used to knowing how others really feel about him. He's afraid to bloom, all he feels now is pain."

"It's not fair my lord. I will be so bold as to say I think it's disgraceful."

"No it's not fair and my fault. I too can make mistakes in judgment. Now I must fix the errors I made as a father. Jude, follow your heart and don't give up on your flower." Mane said vanishing and leaving Jude stunned with his final two words.

"Mine?" Jude asked and a disembodied voice chuckled.

"Aye, Drone. Yours." Mane said and Jude's knees went weak and he sat on the boulder in shock. He knew the portent of Mane's words, he knew nothing more about Callan than his name and his circumstances and suddenly Mane was telling him he'd just met the one who would be the love of his life and a lazy smile spread across Jude's face.

That outrageously beautiful, lonely youth was his. Or at least would be if Jude heeded Mane's advice and chased after him. Only time would tell what would make them fall in love with each other, and Jude knew finding his match meant not giving up when Callan ran, Jude vowed no matter how bad it got, he wasn't ever going to admit defeat.

The battle to win Callan began immediately and Jude ran in the direction Callan had and soon found him again sitting on the temple stairs. "Why are you following me?" Callan asked and Jude just smiled.

"Do I need a reason other than I think you deserve fun too?"

"Please, please stop." Callan said getting up to run again and Jude seized his hand.

"Stop wanting to see you smile? Impossible."

"You just don't understand. Please Jude stop this, it's killing me enough and you're only making it worse!" Callan said ripping his hand free and running as fast as his feet would carry him.

Steffan and Mali and the girls jumped when the door banged and Callan raced across the infirmary and up the stairs to his room. Steffan was up in an instant, he'd only be gone less than half an hour and he could hear his son sobbing in his room. The door locked.

"Callie? Son? What's wrong?" Steffan asked knocking on the door.

"Dad please! Just leave me alone please!" Callan sobbed.

"I will not until you tell me what is wrong, what happened?"

Steffan was met with silence and only bitter sobbing. A gentle cough came from the open door. "I can tell you." Jude said quietly, so Callan couldn't hear him and motioned that Steffan should follow him.

He told Steffan of Callan's treatment at the bonfire and how he had been ostracized by his peers. How Jude had found him sobbing and what Callan had said about being nothing more than a toy and how he had given up wanting anything for himself.

With every word, Steffan's heart sank. "I didn't realize it was that bad."

"He didn't want to hurt you too I'm sure. He seems quite caring." Jude said and Steffan nodded.

"Callie in an empath, he knows very well the truth in all hearts. He wouldn't mention to me or his mother or to anyone something he knew would upset us. Damn it."

"I promise to help you Brother Steffan. I have a little at stake here too." Jude began and telling Callan's father what Mane said. Steffan looked shocked for a moment. Then realized Callan was almost eighteen, it was high time, well past time he should have been seeking affection and he hadn't. He wasn't a little boy anymore and here was the man that was going to replace father as the most important person in Callan's life.

Jude sighed. "I won't step on your toes sir, I just thought you should know I'm not going to give up trying."

"I would hope you don't son. Thank you for telling me the truth."

"It seemed only right to do so and I think I pushed him enough for one night, I should leave him be."

“That is wise. Come tomorrow at noon, he’s always free at noon. His favorite subject to study is literature. He’s quite the poet actually.” Steffan said, giving Jude a tip before going back inside and Jude just smiled and went back to his room for the night.

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Chapter II - "Lessons in Mortality"
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Steffan smiled as he sat at his desk going over an herbal manual drinking his tea. Mali and the girls had purposefully made themselves scarce and Callan was reading a book at the table sipping tea and looking absorbed in his reading when Jude arrived carrying a small book in his hands. Steffan chose that minute to disappear into the infirmary to check on his patients, leaving Callan oblivious to their guest standing in the open doorway smiling. He walked over and leaned over Callan's shoulder startling him. "A herd of cows could have walked in through here and you'd have not noticed. What's so interesting?" Jude asked amused at Callan's initial squawk of fright.

"You scared the life out of me. Do you make a habit of sneaking up on people Brother Jude?" Callan asked annoyed which only made him more adorable to Jude.

"I wasn't sneaking, you my friend were nose into adventure. What are you reading?" Jude winked and Callan sighed.

"Just history on the War of Succession."

"Oh that definitely qualifies as adventure. King Seres was a brilliant strategist and general. We have him to thank for the freedom of our orders and the stipends for orphans that fund our coffers. Among the other great laws that man passed. One of the greatest Kings in our history."

"Aye." Callan replied, noticing for the first time the sincere attraction Jude had for History. His hazel eyes danced with knowledge and interest in subject. His light brown hair was long and contained at the nape of his neck in a leather lace. His skin fair from spending many hours indoors over books and in the daylight Jude noticed for the first time how young and how very handsome he was. His smile was kind and he emoted genuine friendliness and interest without a trace of jealousy, nervousness, or apprehension. In fact he emoted so much interest he took Callan by surprise. The interest was not just in history either, it was for Callan specifically and Callan was shocked, no one ever was interested in him.

"I brought you something." Jude said setting the small book on the table with a smile. "Your father mentioned you liked literature and I brought this with me from the capitol. It's just a collection of poems, light reading, but some of them very good. I thought you might enjoy reading it too. Your father said you write."

“A-aye. Thank you. Why?” Callan asked, utterly lost in composure and confused and Jude just smiled.

“Why not Callan? Must I have a reason to wish to be your friend?”

“No-no. I didn’t mean to insult you, it’s just nobody...” Callan stumbled over his words and Jude just took up a chair beside him and grinned.

“You didn’t insult me Callan and everyone here in my opinion are a pack of boobs for the way they treat you. It’s not your fault a god has a tantrum in a classroom. I think it’s shameful how you’ve been set apart and I would very much like to be your friend Callan, if you’d let me.”

“I don’t know what to say...” Callan said lost and Jude just took his hand.

“Say you’ll have lunch with me in the mess and we can talk about your study. King Seres is an interesting subject and a particular interest of mine too.”

Callan smiled and nodded. “Alright.” Callan said closing his book and following Jude out. Steffan smiled from the doorway and went back to his patients. He already liked Jude, he seemed a very genuine young man and Steffan had to admit quite a fine looking one too.

Jude noticed Callan chose a corner to sit in, well away from the others who all looked nervous at his presence and thus effected him. He fidgeted, his attention divided and he kept looking over his shoulder worried. Jude sighed. “Callan, ignore them.” Jude said and Callan sighed.

“I can’t. You really don’t understand Jude. You’ve not been here long enough, but all they say is true. Even I don’t know when Calanthe will show up and he...”

“He what?” Jude asked seeing Callan was afraid.

“I’m afraid he may hurt someone. Calanthe can be jealous, he does not like to share his toy.” Callan said and Jude’s eyes widened.

“I cannot believe Mane would let his son hurt someone.” Jude said and Callan gave a rueful smile.

“Calanthe almost killed me. It was his fault I was born so premature, impatient to play with me. Then again when I was little, he didn’t like me playing with the other kids and thankfully I was the only one hurt when he got angry and over turned our boat in the lake. I almost drowned. I can’t risk getting close to people Jude.

Calanthe does not like me to and I'd die if someone got hurt because of me." Callan said and Jude looked horrified.

"Does he expect you to live your whole life only at his beck and call?" Jude asked incredulous and Callan sighed.

"Yes. So you see, this was what I was trying to tell you last night Jude. These people have every right to treat me as they do, I am a threat to them if I get too close. It's not that I don't want to get close, I can't. Please understand, I'm so very touched you want to be my friend, but for your safety I beg you not to follow me anymore."

Jude was about to reply when he saw true fear in Callan's eyes and he followed the gaze and across the table sat a six year old boy, he glowed with an angry aura and it seemed no one saw him but Callan and Jude.

"Why aren't you at home? I don't like having to find you Callan." He said and Callan trembled.

"I am sorry my lord. I only came to eat lunch." Callan said, his voice trembling.

"You can eat later, come play with me now."

"Yes my lord." Callan said standing and Jude's hand shot out and dragged Callan back into his seat.

"Listen here, I don't care if you are a god. You don't treat friends like servants!" Jude said and Calanthe's eyes widened.

"You can see me?"

"Yes I can and you are being mean to Callan. You give him no freedom." Jude scolded and the angry aura grew.

"He is my flower. Callan I don't want you to talk to this person anymore, I don't like him." Calanthe said and Callan turned resigned and devastated eyes to Jude.

"I told you. I am sorry Jude. Farewell." Callan said standing and once more Jude grabbed his hand.

"No Callan. This ends, right here. I don't care if you are a god Calanthe you are acting like a rotten spoiled child and if no one else will stand up to you I will. You are hurting Callan and I won't let you get away with it."

“Callan is MINE!” Calanthe yelled and his eyes flashed and Jude was flung back out of his seat by a force and he cracked his head against the wall, before he blacked out he heard Callan yell his name and saw his tearful face over him weeping. A gentle hand holding his and frantically yelling for someone to go get his father to help Jude.

Jude felt Callan’s hand be ripped away and as his eyes closed, he saw Calanthe in triumph pulling Callan away.

When Jude awoke, his head was bandaged and he was in the infirmary, Mali beside him on one side and Steffan on the other. “Callan? Where’s Callan?” Jude asked trying to sit up and Steffan pushed him back down.

“He hasn’t come back yet, no one has seen him since this afternoon. What happened? The others in the mess said they saw you yelling at empty air and then you went head first into the wall. Was it Calanthe?”

“Aye. The spoiled little brat! God or not I’d turn that little monster over my knee!” Jude growled and tried once more to get up only to get dizzy again.

“Don’t get up Jude, you have a nasty concussion.” Steffan said looking over at Mali. “I never knew it was this bad. Callan never told us.” He said and Mali sighed.

“Because he knew it would upset us, but in the end it only made it worse on himself. Calanthe has him cowed into submission, I’m afraid my son takes after me and is easily bullied. I too once turned inwards and accepted cruelty and never fought back. That was against mortal men and not a god either. I cannot imagine his fear.” Mali said trying not to cry.

Mane appeared and sat on the end of Jude’s bed. “He’s hiding Callan on the large island in the lake.” Mane said reaching over to touch Jude’s brow. “I heal you and I give you my protection, Calanthe cannot hurt you now. I have tried everything to break him of his spoiled nature. I never thought he would go so far as to injure a mortal willingly. I have punished, deprived, scolded and still Calanthe disobeys me. He cannot see the folly in his choices. I am forced to bind my own son until he learns. My barrier is now around the island, Calanthe is bound to that spot on the mortal plane, he will not be able to leave it. He can only exist now in my gardens and on that island in this mortal world. Until he learns, he will not be free again.” Mane said, looking not like a god but a distraught and troubled father at his wits end.

“Go get your flower Jude, I grant you the power to protect him from Calanthe. Calanthe listens to no one, not even me. Perhaps when a mortal stranger teaches him he cannot have everything it will be the first step to his understanding. It is my lover’s moon tonight, go and free your flower from his

emotional shackles and pain.” Mane said leaving and Jude sat up determined. His concussion healed.

“Take a boat, Ever since Calanthe almost drown Callie, he’s been terrified of the water, he can’t swim and could never learn his fears overwhelm him.” Steffan said and Mali handed Jude a sack.

“He’s probably hungry too, He never ate breakfast this morning and I doubt very much he’s eaten anything else today either. There are four islands in the lake, the large one is right in the middle and it has smaller islands around it, it’s probably better for Callan to just make one of the smaller islands in the dark, his fear of the water will be worse at night not being able to see. Come back in the morning.” Mali said stuffing a large blanket and pillows into another sack, it was a warm enough night that sleeping outside wasn’t going to be cold. It was the first night of summer after all and many couples tonight would be sleeping under the stars.

All three raced to the edge of the lake and Jude jumped into one of the small row boats moored for pleasure outings. He tossed the supplies inside and grabbed the oars and with hardly a goodbye, he began to row, disappearing into the darkness.

Steffan laid an arm around Mali’s shoulders. “We’ve been so blind Mali. How could we have missed it?”

“Because Callie didn’t want to burden us with his troubles Steffan when he was little. He’s no longer a child and what young man wants to come running to his parents when he’s hurting? He’s so used to bottling up his own emotions and blocking out everyone else’s he on the verge of a breakdown. It’s not our shoulders he needs to cry on, it’s Jude’s he needs now. I must say that young man has guts to scold a god.”

“Aye. It almost cost him too. But I know how he feels, the first time I met you I’d have wrestled a god to protect you too. I didn’t know you either when I fell in love with you at first sight.”

“Because drones are drawn to flowers Steffan. Callan may be physically male, but he’s as much a flower as I am everywhere else. Jude will be in for a shock tonight, we bloom under a moon and Callan’s scent is as strong as mine and that time you found two pearls on the bathroom floor, those weren’t mine you realize. Callan missed a few.” Mali said and Steffan nodded.

“I knew. They looked different than yours. Yours are almost pink, those I found were pure white. I wasn’t about to embarrass him, all sixteen year olds have urges. I remember being a teenager and having a rather good relationship with my own right hand for a long time. It’s human nature, it’s a biological drive.

Especially in Callan's case, too afraid to talk to anyone let alone love them. Jude is exactly what he needs, he's well passed the age he should have spent this night with someone other than his parents. Did you pack mead in that sack?"

"Of course I did. Jude is buzzing like a drone in heat, once he gets Callie alone and he gets a whiff of a moon flower on the lover's moon he's going to be mad with need to pollinate his flower. I also packed a little help." Mali smiled and Steffan chuckled, knowing precisely what Mali meant as they turned back home to wait until morning. He was already getting the urge for his own flower who smelled divine all the time, but especially on this night of all nights. Four of their six children had been conceived on this night and had birthdays within days of each other.

Callan was sick with fear. He hated the water and it was on all sides of the island. Calanthe had forced him into a boat that had rowed itself out to the lake, which was a good thing considering Callan had fainted not long after he was forced to climb into the boat.

That had not made Calanthe happy. It deprived him of playtime but he also knew Callan wasn't going anywhere of his own accord. Even to escape Callan wouldn't get into the boat willingly and he'd never be able to row it himself.

"Tell me another story!" Calanthe demanded and Callan obeyed. His stomach in knots from fear and hunger and growling as he told Calanthe a story of King Seres. All the while absently talking his mind on Jude's state of health, he had been seriously hurt, the knock to his head had left a nasty blood stain on the wall and Callan's white robe was spattered with it, reminding him the it was all his fault Jude was hurt.

He should have trusted his better judgment and told Jude 'no' and not gone with him to mess. He'd let attraction to a handsome face and gentle kindness and sincerity sway him. He'd let his own loneliness for companionship err his actions and now Jude was hurt because of him. He wouldn't blame Jude for hating him for the rest of his natural life.

"I don't like that story, tell a different one!" Calanthe said and Callan was jarred out of his misery and began another tale.

"Once upon a time there was a flower. It sat all alone in a pretty garden. It was a plain flower, not fancy like the irises, nor stunning as lilies. He was simple and just one color of pink. All the other flowers used to talk to each other, but never to him. He was too plain and the god of his creation jealous. He didn't like others talking to his flower so he made sure that no one touched his flower by hurting those who came too close. This made the flower very sad. He had no friends,

just his god. He had to tell stories to his god and make him happy or else the god got angry. However, the god never considered how his flower felt, he didn't care what the flower wanted. So long as the flower did as he was told the god was pleased." Callan began and Calanthe sat smiling as Callan told a new story, one he hadn't heard before.

Neither of them noticed the dark figure standing in the shadows listening and waiting.

"One day a bee came to the flower and asked him why he was so sad all the time. The flower was afraid to tell the kind bee his sorrows. He feared the bee would get hurt like all the others who had tried to be nice to the flower. He told the bee to go away, but the bee could see the flower crying when he said this, he knew the flower was hurting so he asked again what was wrong. The flower tried again to tell the nice bee to go away and not worry over a plain little flower. The bee left, but came back the very next day with a present for the flower to try and cheer him up. The flower was touched, the bee was so very nice to him when he didn't have to be. He could have been like all the others and left, but he didn't. The bee had such a kind heart and he was sad for the flower. He asked the flower to be his friend. The flower was so afraid, but the bee was so very kind the flower did a very foolish thing and talked to the bee. He told the bee how his God didn't like his flower having friends. He told the handsome drone that he was happy that the bee wanted to be his friend but also told him again that they could not be friends. He was afraid the god would hurt the drone." Callan said, his own tears falling as he told his own story.

"While they were talking together, the God came and he was angry that his flower was talking to a drone. He yelled at the drone and the drone yelled back. He told the god he was being cruel to the flower and held his flower a prisoner and not a friend. The god got even angrier and the flower had to watch the poor drone get hurt when he was only trying to protect the flower. The flower is all alone again, even more a prisoner than before his heart broken for the kind drone who probably hates the flower now like all the others hate the flower. However, the flower will always love the drone who tried to be his friend. For just a few minutes he gave the flower a little happiness he will always carry in his heart. Even if he hates the flower now as he should, the flower will always forgive him his hate." Callan said sobbing and Jude stepped from the shadows.

"The drone would never hate his flower." Jude said and Callan looked up devastated and Calanthe was glowing angrily.

"Jude! Oh Jude why did you come here?" Callan sobbed and Jude just walked over and pulled Callan into his arms tightly.

"Because the flower is in trouble and the Drone loves the flower and did the first moment he saw the bloom in the garden." Jude said turning to Calanthe. "You

are too cruel to him! I will not let you hurt Callan anymore.” Jude said and Calanthe stood and stomped his foot like a petulant child.

“Callan is MINE!”

“Did you not listen to the story Callan told you? Do you not realize you are that mean god who keeps his flower a prisoner?”

“I am not! Callan is my flower!”

“You really are a rotten, spoiled child! Callan is not some toy to play with! He’s got feelings too you little brat! Did you ever ask him what he wanted?”

“He’s my flower!”

“Yes, he is, he is also his own person. A person you have locked up in emotional hell you little monster. You hurt all those who would want to be his friend too, you make Callan so afraid you’re going to kill somebody he obeys you out of fear and not love! That is not how friends treat each other.”

“You just want to take him away from me like Mommy and Daddy!”

“With good reason! You’ve almost killed him yourself, you’re so jealous and possessive you can’t see past your own little nose! He may be a flower in your garden Calanthe, but you do not own him! Does your father claim he owns his people?”

“No, but...”

“No but nothing! Does your uncle claim he owns his flowers?”

“No, but...”

“No but Calanthe! Face the truth, Callan does not and never has belonged to you! Let him go!”

“NO! Callan is mine!” Calanthe lashed out and bright light shot out of his little hands and Jude turned to block Callan with his body and Callan screamed in fear, blinded by the light and terror that Jude was going to die. His arms held Jude’s waist tightly, his face was buried in a strong chest and he heard a gentle voice in his ear.

“Fear not Callie, Mane’s protection is on us, I will protect you.” He said as the light faded and Callan looked up into Jude’s soft eyes and was lost. Such love he’d never seen before and it was for him, for Callan.

“Jude... I...” Callan couldn’t speak, his words leaving him as Jude’s hands came up to cup his face.

“I love you too Callie.” Jude said dipping his head to place a tender kiss on Callan’s lips. Chaste but oh so warm. Calanthe howled in rage.

“MY FLOWER!”

“No, my flower Calanthe. There is more to the story Callan was telling you. While the Drone was wounded, Mane came to him. Healed him and sent him out to find the flower. Mane was sad his own son was so cruel and bade the drone to save his flower and he gave the drone protection against the child god in order to protect the flower. Had he not, what you just did would have killed them both. So blind to your own jealousy you’d have killed the flower too.” Jude said holding Callan in his arms and looking at a now devastated Calanthe.

“Callan? Do you hate me?” He asked and Callan sighed.

“Hate you? No. Fear you? Yes. When we were little you hurt so many of my other friends. When I got older you kept me from everyone because I was afraid you’d hurt them too. Calanthe, I am not a child anymore, I am mortal and I have a mortal heart that wants to feel love without fear. Please don’t hurt Jude anymore, I love him and I fear to love him because of you.” Callan said and Calanthe pouted.

Mane appeared with Endymion before Calanthe. “You are forbidden all your flowers until you learn the error of your ways Calanthe. You are forbidden to enter this mortal realm except to this one island. You may not leave this island, you may only watch the mortals on the shores of the lake. You are forbidden to dance with them anymore. You are forbidden to touch your blooms in my moon garden, they have been sealed from you until you see the folly of what you have done. I am so very, very disappointed in you my son. Say good-bye to Callan, this is the last time you will ever see him unless he forgives you and comes here to see you. I would not blame him if he never comes to see you again. It’s your fault he almost died at birth, your fault he almost drowned and now has a crippling fear of the water, your fault he fears you, your fault he suffers and your fault he is in pain. Even I would not be friends with you and you are my son.” Mane said and Calanthe sobbed as Endymion crossed his arms over his chest.

“You too are just a flower Calanthe and you forget your place too. The God Father rules the heavens, the Goddess mother rules the earth, Your father is the guardian of the moon and love and Sol is the guardian of the sun and fields. You, like me, my son are just a flower in the garden of the moon, you have no right to treat mortals as you do. Go home.” Endymion scolded and Calanthe vanished and Mane turned to Jude and Callan and smiled sadly.

“Dearest Callan, all your life you suffer in silence and I already know your gentle heart forgives. Do not come back as soon as you intend, you do him no service if you do. He must learn what it feels like to suffer too. I ask you to wait at least ten years before you come to comfort him. It may seem a long time to you, to a God it is a few moments. This lesson in truth has to have time to take hold and humble him. Just go and be happy little flower, you are well passed the time you should know freedom.” Mane said turning to Jude.

“Drone, you did well, I think at last he has heard and will now have time to think over the last story he was told. He has learned that he cannot bully everyone. Go now and be happy, both of you. Tonight is a night made for you.” Mane said and he and Endymion vanished and Jude, still holding Callan smiled down and then inhaled deeply.

“Tell me I’m not imagining things. Do you always smell like this?” He asked and Callan smiled and blushed.

“At night I do, yes. I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be sorry, it’s wonderful, you do smell like Callan blooms.”

“I am a Callan bloom. The flower analogy was real Jude. I am a mortal flower, like my mother and sisters. Only mother is both genders, being the holy flower, my siblings and I are technically only half flowers, father is simply mortal.”

“I’m getting light headed you smell so nice. Come on, let’s get off this island before I get too drunk to row.” Jude said and Callan froze in fear.

“I forgot... I...”

“I know you fear it Callie. I’ll only take us to the next island I won’t row us all the way back in the dark I won’t let you get hurt I promise.” Jude said coaxing a terrified and shaking Callan to the boat and casting off into the darkness.

Series Title: *Le Storie Del Sole e Dalla Luna*
(Stories of the Sun and the Moon)
Book V: *I Fuchi e Fiorisce*
(Drones and Blooms)
 Author: D. Sanders
Chapter III - "The Drone and His Flower"
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Jude sat on the bench of the small rowboat and had Callan sit between in legs on the bottom of the boat so he could hide his face against Jude so he didn't have to look at the water since hearing it was bad enough on his nerves.

It was only a few minutes, but for Callan it was an eternity before the boat made shore of the next island and Jude carried him from the boat onto dry land again.

Once there they both froze in wonder. On the beach was a white tent gleaming in the moonlight, Endys Blossoms strewn all over the beach and thousands of candles twinkled to life suddenly. A small low table with pillow cushions was in front of the tent and there was a feast for two set out with a large bottle of mead sitting between the two places at the table.

It was intimate and romantic and indication that Mane intended these two to come together that night.

Callan was suddenly very nervous and his scent magnified because of it and a thousand butterflies had taken up residence in his empty stomach.

Jude just took his hand and smiled. "Your mother packed us dinner too. It seems it was unnecessary. I know you're hungry Callie, I know you didn't eat with me and your mother told me you didn't eat this morning either and it's hours passed dinner. I can hear your stomach from here, come on and eat first and let's talk properly. I suddenly have a million questions for you." Jude said and Callan smiled and nodded and let Jude lead him over to the table.

Over their very romantic dinner, they talked, truly talked without fear and without interruptions and learned more about each other than just mutual attraction. Callan learned about Jude's passions for study and that he too had once been the one other's hated in school because he too had wrecked grading curves with honors and perfect scores. He learned Jude liked poetry and that was why he'd had that book and he was longing to read the poems that Callan had written, that he'd never shown anyone before, not even his parents. Jude confessed that the first time he'd laid eyes on Callan he was interested, he thought Callan was the prettiest man he'd ever laid eyes on and Callan blushed at the compliment.

Jude learned Callan was terminally shy. Partly due to fear and partly because of his nature. He blushed easily and with such dark skin showing a blush at all was hard, his skin just tended to darken on his cheeks and his ears. He learned Callan loved to read, his favorite tutor growing up had been brother Gaar who

was an acclaimed writer himself. Writing everything from actual history to just fanciful musings from his creative mind and he's encouraged Callan's imagination at an early age.

Writing relaxed Callan and let him escape into words and this world and into one of his own creation. Jude learned Callan was naturally docile and serene and when he spoke it was light and when he talked of things he was passionate about his tenor took on a dream like quality that sent shivers down Jude's receptive spine.

Jude was drunk on his scent alone, but add into it Callan's fey beauty, his intelligence and his sweet demeanor and Jude was lost entirely. Callan was his perfect match, his flower.

As conversation turned to passions and dinner eaten Jude leaned over and whispered into Callan's ear making him shiver.

"I love you Callie. I beg you to honor me with your cup tonight." He purred and Callan shivered and his hands shook as he silently poured a cup of mead and his hands continued to shake as he blushed, looked down shyly and held the cup up to Jude's lips.

"Look at me Callie please." Jude said and waited for Callan to look up before he drank from the cup in Callan's hands, his eyes never closing and locking with Callan's.

When he finished the ceremonial supping from the virgin's cup, Jude took the cup from Callan's hands and then took Callan's hands and made him rise, leading him back to the waiting tent, the floor covered in white bed pillows and blankets.

Callan's entire body quivered as Jude's hands tugged the belt holding Callan's blood stained robe on and let it slip from his slender shoulders. He crossed his arms over his chest modestly, standing there in just a pair of light trousers.

Jude moved his arms. "Don't hide Callie, you're so beautiful." He said letting his own robe fall off his broad shoulders before he led Callan over to the pillows and pulled him down to kiss him. Truly kiss him. Not the chaste brush he'd given before, but a deep, plundering kiss that left Callan breathless.

Jude's hands running down a smooth chest to the drawstring that held on Callan's pants. Callan tensed but allowed Jude to undress him fully. "You smell so good." Jude groaned, kissing down Callan's stomach and inhaling deeply a maddening floral scent.

Callan's erection was just as beautiful as the rest of him and the tip was already weeping in longing. Jude ran his finger over the bead of moisture, making Callan hiss and as the drop fell from Jude's finger, it turned into a white pearl that rolled and settled on Callan's stomach.

"You really are a flower. Your seeds are pearls." Jude was amazed and couldn't resist placing the pearl on his tongue. It dissolved like sugar and tasted nearly as sweet. Jude shuddered, needing and wanting more. His mouth was hungry, the Drone had tasted the nectar of his flower and needed more. He devoured Callan with thirsty lips and Callan moaned and arched into the touch. He shivered and shook with pleasure as Jude's tongue and lips sucked and licked, drawing forth the flower's seeds.

Callan cried out when he came and Jude's mouth refused to lose a single pearl, he needed them all, they were food for a hungry drone.

He sat up licking his lips, a feral look on his face. The drone was buzzing with need and his flower was blooming beneath him. Beside the pillows were colorful bottles of oil and Jude picked one up and uncorked it. "Roll over Beloved. Let me show you even better pleasure." Jude purred and Callan complied silently, panting still from his release.

Jude upended the bottle on Callan's back and strong hands started rubbing the oil into Callan's tense body, making him relax. From his shoulders, down his back, to the perfect globes of his posterior that Jude kneaded making Callan purr in bliss.

Once Callan was relaxed, those slick oil coated fingers began another mission of pleasure, the first finger toying with the ring of flesh that quivered before the finger slid inside easily.

Callan moaned in pleasure and Jude smiled as he picked up another bottle. It had a neck tiny and was slender tapered bottle and he uncorked the bottle and coated the neck first before sliding it inside and letting the oil spill out inside Callan's body. Coating him thoroughly, moving the finger sized bottle in and out, stretching a pliant and receptive willing virgin. The flower opening before the drone's eyes.

"So beautiful." Jude groaned, one hand coming to his own trousers and shoving them around his knees as he worked the oil into his lover. He tossed the bottle aside and pulled Callan up to his knees by his hips. Spreading his legs wide and positioning himself behind his lover and then pushing his own erection home into welcoming confines.

"JUDE!" Callan sobbed as his body was filled with Jude's manhood and just the sound of his name being cried out in passion was Jude's undoing. Callan's scent

was intoxicating and filling the entire tent in fragrance, his warm body accepting his drone with moans and cries and the sounds of wet friction filled the night as Jude thrust, his pace steady and firm.

“Callie! Oh so good.” Jude groaned, his breath ragged as he thrust into Callan’s body and watching Callan reach back and stroke his own reawakened erection in time to Jude’s thrusts.

Jude had to see and he pulled out of Callan and turned him on to his back holding up and open Callan’s legs as he began to thrust again. “Stroke yourself Callie, I want to see you come.” Jude said and Callan complied, arching into Jude’s thrusts, making them penetrate deeper as his hand moved on his own erection.

“Jude, Jude, JUDE!” Callan sobbed as his body released and showered his chest and the bed in pearls.

Jude rolled his eyes in ecstasy, losing his resolve at Callan laid bare beneath him and he came in a great shout of release, driving the last few thrusts deeply into Callan’s body as his body rocked in orgasm. His own mortal seed now filling the virgin sacrifice under Mane’s Lover’s Moon. The virgin no more and only the Drone’s pollinated flower remained.

Jude crushed Callan’s mouth in a kiss as he lay atop Callan, his spent erection still buried within him. He moved to pull out and Callan gripped him closer, his legs coming up around Jude’s hips.

“No, please. Stay in me. Please.” He sobbed and Jude just nodded and nibbled at Callan’s earlobe.

“Aye flower. Not for long though, I am well spent.” Jude said feeling his manhood slowly slip out on it’s own as he returned to a flaccid state again.

“I know. Oh Jude that was so beautiful.” Callan sighed as Jude nibbled his neck.

“You’re beautiful. I love you Callie.” Jude whispered in the shell of Callan’s delicate ear making him shiver.

“I know, I can feel it all around me and I love you too Jude. So very much.”

“I know blossom. You showed me how much tonight. You gave me a very precious gift and not just your body, but your heart.” Jude said and Callan cried joyful tears as he clutched Jude to his chest, wanting to stay forever beneath this man who made him feel so very loved and alive.

“Always Jude. Always and Always.” Callan’s voice hitched and Jude rolled to spoon up with Callan in the pillows and hold him close.

“Will you take vows with me Callie?” Jude asked and Callan sniffled.

“Oh aye. I could never love anyone else Jude. Not now, not ever.” Callan said and Jude smiled into white blond hair and cried himself for joy.

“I always knew there was one perfect person out there for me, and I found you at last.” Jude said as the night caught up to them and as the sky started to turn a dusty pink at dawn, they fell asleep in each other’s arms.

It was mid-morning before either of them stirred and it was Jude who came to wakefulness first and only because his internal body clock always woke him at this time of day so he could go to the archive and work. It took a moment for him to register his surroundings and then a lazy, happy smile spread across his face as white blond hair lay splayed across his chest tickling his chin and a warm little body was using his chest as a pillow.

The previous nights events replaying in his mind, specifically the rather intimate events after dinner which had led up to them falling asleep naked in pillows and Callie’s pearls littering the bed.

Jude’s arms just came up around Callie to hold him gently, not wanting to wake his lover yet, but Callie evidently was a light sleeper and the movement woke him. “Is it morning already?” He asked sleepily and Jude chuckled.

“Aye blossom. How do you feel this morning?” Jude asked and Callie just sighed and nestled closer to Jude.

“Tired, stiff and so very happy.” Callan replied lifting his face from Jude’s chest to smile the most beautiful smile Jude had ever seen. Gone was the haunting sadness in Callan’s eyes and only love remained.

“If you smile at me like that every morning Callie I’ll be a happy man indeed.” Jude said rolling to move Callan beneath him to kiss him good morning.

“Love me like you do and I will ever smile. When you touch me it amplifies what I feel from your emotions. I’ve never liked being touched before, now I cannot get enough. Your love is so warm, like sleeping in a patch of sunshine it is.”

“You just described how you make me feel and I am no empath. I’m so happy I can make you feel comfort Callie, I do love you very much.”

“I know.” Callan purred, his arms coming up around Jude’s neck and his eyes alight with joy. “Will you kiss me again?”

“Blossom, you never have to ask for those.” Jude grinned, complying with Callan’s wishes and kisses led to more exploration of bodies in the sunlight and warmth of their bed pillows.

Callan’s shyness, at least around Jude was gone and had been replaced by an eager and receptive young lover, newly awakened to his sexuality and blossoming into an extremely sensual and intimate lover.

The way he moaned Jude’s name, the way he writhed beneath his lover, the way his legs came up around Jude’s hips urging him deeper, the way his hands got lost in Jude’s wild and sleep messed locks as they kissed, the way his tongue battled Jude’s in their kiss. The way his hands ran down Jude’s back to grab hold of tight muscular buttocks cheeks to pull Jude even deeper while he arched into the touch. The way his scent magnified when in the throws of passion and the unguarded faces of ecstasy he made while being loved physically. Jude would discover part of Callan’s inhibitions were partly due to Jude’s own emotions.

Callan could feel Jude’s desire and in turn it would magnify his own. He couldn’t help but respond in ways that drove Jude mad with excitement. He knew without being told what would spark Jude’s fire and in doing so, his own passion doubled. There would be no secrets between them, Callan would always know what Jude desired most and willingly give it to him with his entire being. Their sex life together would never be unfulfilling, not with a lover who could read you as easily as a book and respond to you wordlessly with his beautiful body.

After their morning round of lovemaking and after sating very hungry bodies with the left over fruit and mead from dinner the night before Jude went in search of their discarded robes and laughed when he held them up. No longer white, but blood red. “Mane sure does like lovers to advertise their business today.”

“It’s tradition. A virgin’s blood is spilt and love comes into being. I never thought I’d ever wear red on this day.” Callan said as Jude slipped the light summer robe over Callan’s shoulder.

“Or have yourself pampered shamelessly today. It’s also tradition I wait on you hand and foot today. I can truthfully say I am looking forward to it immensely.” Jude said planting a kiss on the back of Callan’s neck and Callan looked over his shoulder at Jude and smiled.

“I will be easy to please. Read me poems with that wonderful baritone of yours and I shall melt. I adore your voice.” Callan said and Jude smiled pulling his own robe on.

"Then we're even, you give me the shivers when you say my name. I'd love to hear you sing one day, you must have such a beautiful singing voice."

"I don't actually. I'm hopelessly tone deaf much to uncle Toba's chagrin. Both my parents such wonderful singers and musicians and I inherited not a scrap of their talents. I can compose music, I can hear it in my head, but play it or sing it myself I cannot."

"Toba is your uncle? That wild redheaded Music teacher?" Jude asked and Callan nodded.

"By vows he is. He is married to my Uncle Rashaad, my mother's brother."

"The crazy big man with an unhealthy love of sweating, who made me run laps the minute I set foot here?"

Callan laughed. "That would be my uncle aye."

"Explains the dark skin you have then, but I pity you your youth, I am not a devotee of breaking a sweat."

"It's good for you though, gets your heart pumping and keeps you fit."

"Blossom the only heart pumping activity I want to do willingly you just experienced." Jude said wagging his eyebrows and Callan laughed and walked over and wrapped his arms around Jude's neck.

"Then I must keep you in shape myself then."

"Oh please tell me that's a promise Callie."

"Oh aye." Callan grinned and Jude laughed and scooped him up into his arms.

"Let's go home." Jude said and Callan tensed but nodded.

"Oh to have a magic pill to make me sleep for this. I know I shouldn't be as afraid of the water as I am, I know it's irrational, but I just cannot help it." Callan said sitting in the boat on the beach and already shaking at the thought of being on the water.

"Irrational fears love, most of us have at least one. I do myself and I find it highly ironic now." Jude said moving the boat into the water and climbing in and once more settling Callan between his legs for security while they rowed, making small talk to keep Callan's mind off the journey and telling him his own fears.

"What's that?" Callan asked looking up and Jude and not the water.

“Bees. Here Mane calls me a drone and bees scare the piss out of me. I know where my fear comes from too, just like you. When I was eight years old, I was messing about where I shouldn’t have been and tossing a ball around near the honey hives in the order. I managed to toss the ball into one and I set off a swarm. I must have been stung a hundred times before the bee keeper managed to get them off me and ever since I freeze up solid in fear when I see a bee. The adult me knows that little honey bee in the flower isn’t going to hurt me, the child inside me is screaming. Believe me love I understand irrational fears.”

“Oh that must have been painful.”

“Oh aye. Almost killed me, I was swollen from head to toe with bee poison, welts everywhere and I couldn’t move I hurt so bad for two weeks. Then after I healed I had a month kitchen duty as punishment for destroying a hive and playing where I knew I shouldn’t have been. Double ouch, I hate kitchen duty almost as much as I hate bees.”

Callan chuckled. “Kitchen duty here is for novices only. I think we all hate kitchen duty. I’d much rather be nose in books than peeling potatoes.”

“Same here.” Jude said as the little boat made shore and once again Jude was carrying Callan to the shore so he didn’t get his feet wet.

Several young couples were out that morning around the lake and all eyes turned in shock as the boat came in and out stepped Jude and Callan, both dressed in red.

Hushed conversations sprang up all over.

“Good god, after what Calanthe did to Jude yesterday how on earth did he dare mating with Callie?”

“How did he touch Callan at all? You know he can’t stand people touching him. That’s an awfully intimate touch.”

“I’d not have my wanker exposed around Callan, Calanthe might rip it off.”

“Aye. I mean Jude was hurt already, he’s either brave or stupid to tempt that fate again. Callan’s nice and pretty and all, but not worth the risk. That’s taking your manhood in your hands that is!”

“You’re all so mean, Callan is sweet, I think it’s wonderful he finally has someone not afraid to be around him. It’s not Callie’s fault, I don’t think he ever asked for Calanthe to be so mean to everyone. He was always crying, look at that smile! I say he deserves to be happy too.”

“He’s right, Callan never did those things, it was always Calanthe. Even Callan almost died once or twice because of Calanthe. It’s cruel on Callan and I think it’s about time someone had the balls to stand up to Calanthe for Callan’s sake.”

“Let’s just hope Calanthe doesn’t turn up here! I don’t want to be in range when he finds out his favorite toy found a new playmate.”

Thankfully, none of these conversations were overheard as Callan’s feet hit the ground and his mother and his father raced over to embrace them both.

“Callie, you’re not hurt are you? Jude?” Mali asked and Callan smiled and shook his head and beamed happily tucked under Jude’s arm.

“No we’re fine, more than fine Mom.” Callan said looking up at Jude smiling.

“I can see that this morning.” Mali grinned and Steffan laughed.

“Today is they day most people are walking around bowlegged and happy Mali. Are you both happy?” He asked and Callan beamed so brightly Steffan couldn’t remember a time he looked so alive and vibrant.

“Aye Dad. Jude is perfect.”

“Hardly perfect blossom.” Jude grinned and Callan laughed.

“Perfect for me then?”

“Better.” Jude winked and Mali smiled, Jude was perfect for her son if he made Callan smile like that.

“So am I to expect vows between you two?” Steffan asked, the father in him just a little protective still over his son.

“Aye sir. As soon as possible.” Jude said and Steffan smiled.

“Then stop with the sirs already. Steffan or Dad is just fine.” Steffan said as the group walked back toward the infirmary.

“So are you moving in with us or are we moving Callie out?” Steffan asked as they walked and Jude sighed.

“As much as I hate taking him from you, my work demands me to stay where I am. I have a wonderful large room above the archive. I hear it used to be Father Gallus and Father Praduc’s rooms once. There’s a lot of history there, not to mention it’s the room Endys used when he was a novice under Gallus, the

history alone is grand. The convenient location to my work even better. I'm supposed to be taking on a Novice soon too, I'll need the space and the novice room to house him."

"You're in the old storeroom above the archive? I always loved that space, the view from the upper windows is breathtaking over the peach tree orchard. Besides I'm always in the archive myself for my work, it's more convenient for me too."

"Then that's settled. Your mother and I will pack your things for you Callan. Today is a day you're supposed to do absolutely nothing but be pampered." Steffan winked and as predicted Callan blushed.

"Aye." He said and Jude laughed and planted a kiss on his cheek.

"You'd better believe 'aye' my lovely. I think you did request a poetry reading this afternoon?"

"I did." Callan grinned as they reached the infirmary and Callan collected the little book of poems Jude had brought and handed them to his lover.

"Let me pack you a picnic lunch first and you two go find a nice spot to enjoy the day. Callie we'll have your things moved over and we'll not expect to see you both until tomorrow. Then I insist on throwing a celebration party for the family. Toba will kill me if I don't." Mali said laughing and filling a basket with light finger foods and wine.

"Thank you Mom." Callan said kissing her cheek as Jude led him out carrying their basket and the book in one hand and Callan's hand in the other.

Steffan smiled and spooned up behind his wife and sighed where they stood holding each other and watching their firstborn son spread his wings and fly at last. "It's sad to see him grow up, but I couldn't have asked for a better match for him. Jude's a good man."

"And brave. Not many would stand up and face a god, especially after they'd almost been killed, even with Mane promising protection. It still takes courage and I'll not ever worry about Callan as long as he's with Jude. Jude won't allow Callan to be hurt anymore."

"No, he won't. It's also good to see Callan can be touched. I always worried about that, he can't bear people to touch him with his empathic reception. Not even you or I sometimes, did you notice that the entire time they were here, Jude was touching him?"

“Aye, I did and not a hint of emotional turmoil in Callan. Jude is exactly what he needs, I’ll bet you anything Jude’s got some sort of mental perception too and he just doesn’t realize it. He’s blocking Callan instinctually, protecting him from adverse emotional stimuli. You should test him for ESP.”

“You’re probably right Mali. I’ve only known only one other empath and her husband was loaded with ESP that he couldn’t use beyond creating a wall around her. You’re probably exactly right come to think of it, he was drawn to her like bees to flowers too and he let absolutely nothing distress her, she could be halfway across the fields and he’d know right away if she was upset and went running. All his gifts attuned to her alone. Jude’s probably exactly the same.” Steffan said and they heard a laugh behind them and they turned to see Mane.

“That’s exactly what he is, you both are far too clever. He’s always been meant for Callan and it was why the minute he laid eyes on him, he fell in tune. His gifts are very protective in nature; he’s always been that way. Come sit and I’ll tell you about your new son to be.” Mane said looking amused and happy and Mali and Steffan sat with Mane and listened.

“He was born to an unwed mother who left him on the temple steps in the city. His mentor was very old when he took Jude into the temple and then accepted him as his novice in later years. However, let me tell you first of the Child Jude. Always perceptive of others in distress, mild empath himself. He was always a large child, bigger than his year mates and the one thing that makes Jude very angry is bullies, he is the anti-bully. He had a dear friend, Arden was his name, he was always a sickly child and very fey due to his illnesses and he was ever picked on. Jude was always his shadow to protect him when they were very little and bullies soon learned not to pick on people if Jude was nearby. Oh Jude got into much trouble as a youth, giving several black eyes to those who he felt deserved to know what it felt like to have someone bigger picking on them, he’s very prone to deliver an eye for an eye punishment.” Mane chuckled as if remembering.

“Jude has a rather easy to ignite temper. He’s not violent really, he won’t hit you unless you strike first but beware if you do, Jude will make you a rather intimate acquaintance of his fist. He may grumble about physical activity, but he’s as healthy and strong as an ox. When he punches, you remember being struck. He cannot and will not tolerate people who physically oppress the weaker. Jude will ever be their champion, he has a good heart and he cares very deeply about people, sometimes too much.” Mane said with a rueful smile.

“When Arden died when they were ten, Jude made himself sick crying. He could protect Arden against the bigger children, but he couldn’t protect him from his own body’s weaknesses against illness. Oh he was in a rage he was, he felt helpless and it destroyed him not to have the power to protect something he loved. He almost turned from the temple, angry with me specifically he was. He

came to my altar and demanded to know why someone like Arden who was kind had to die when the boys that always picked on him were healthy. He found life most unfair and he demanded answers. He was not about to leave my temple until I appeared and explained myself to him. Even then he had guts to talk to a god as if he were scolding a puppy for peeing on his masters carpets. I love that boy.” Mane said laughing.

“So I came and told him that Gods do not dictate who is strong and who is weak. I explained that, for the most part, Mortals live and die based on the circumstances that they are born into. Only when circumstances change that will alter their path in detrimental ways do Gods interfere and either punish or reward mortals. He then wanted to know why I didn’t interfere and save Arden. I told him Arden walked the path he was meant to, his circumstances had not been altered. His life had touched those it was supposed to, he’d touched Jude and had shaped Jude into the protector he was born to be. Arden’s task in life was done and it was Jude who had to remember his friend in the future. I must tell you, he didn’t like my explanation in the slightest and accepted it grudgingly. Jude can be most stubborn and persistent. He has a very strong will of his own.” Mane said toying with a grape on the table.

“As he got older and became a novice the only reason he chose me and not Sol was because of his own preferences. I mentioned before he cares deeply about people and it always perplexed him why Solar Priests were always changing liaisons and couldn’t seem to make up their minds who they wanted to love and who they didn’t. To Jude, love was something tangible and solid, not something to be played with like a deck of cards. He had loved Arden greatly and had often told him when they were little he was always going to stay with Arden. He would have too had Arden lived. Arden was the first great love of Jude’s life. When Jude loves, he loves with his entire soul.” Mane said looking very pleased.

“The second love of his life hurt him badly. The boy who drank from Jude’s cup when he was fifteen. He hadn’t meant to hurt Jude, but you know Solar priests, they are affectionate one minute and ice cold the next. He was a few years Jude’s senior and a history scholar like Jude. Jude had fallen in love with his intelligence and Yori was a beautiful youth. I mentioned Jude was always large and Yori was fey like Callan, Jude has always been drawn to fey beauty. First Arden, then Yori. As you can also see Jude is quite a strapping and handsome man himself and Yori was equally interested in simply bedding Jude. Therefore, he drank from Jude’s cup, and introduced Jude to his sexuality. It lasted a few months until the new fancy of Yori’s arrived and he began to ignore Jude. When Jude caught them in bed together his heart broke yet again. This time love was not lost to death, but lost to another man. Jude turned to his books and stayed there. In books he didn’t get hurt. He’d look at beautiful men and women but never approached them for love, merely friendship. Until he came here and saw the one that was meant to be his.” Mane grinned.

“Jude is a powerful drone and Callan was the perfect flower that sparked not only physical interest but triggered that obsessive protective nature inside Jude. Even physical interest in Jude fades when he’s triggered to protect. All he saw was pain and because he is attuned to empathic perception too, especially where Callan is concerned, he honed in on Callan like a target. When Callan ran off in tears, Jude hounded the others for answers like he hounded me for them over Arden and what he heard set off that rage he holds inside, so he followed and Callan ran again. Jude has never had anyone run from him so he was perplexed again and I just told him not to give up and to follow those instincts he was fighting. I told you Jude is persistent so he followed again. The rest you know. Had he been able, he’d have turned Calanthe over his own knee for a spanking. No one will ever hurt Callan again, if you thought Jude obsessive before? He’s now ten times so. He’s finally found love and his love is rather demure and docile and easily bullied. Not anymore, they’ll have to get through a rather possessive and obsessive husband first.” Mane said with a smile and Steffan nodded.

“That sounds oddly familiar.” Steffan chuckled looking over at Mali.

“He’s found someone just like Daddy, Aye.” Mali laughed and Mane winked.

“Aye.” Was all Mane said before he was gone again.

Callan was in heaven where he lay comfortable on a blanket with his head resting on Jude’s lap while Jude read him poems from the book. They’d found a nice little secluded spot in one of the fields under a large oak tree with a little brook giving cheerful tinkling water music as a backdrop. They sat in the shade under the tree on the spread out blanket, sipping peach wine while Jude fed sliced fruits to Callan with his fingers before settling to read to him some of his favorite poems from the book.

Jude looking down at Callan, whose face was peaceful and content. His eyes closed just listening to the sound of Jude’s voice. He was so very beautiful, his hair in the sunlight looking pure white it was so blond, even his long eyelashes where they kissed his dark cheeks were white as were his eyebrows. Jude already knew that fair hair was found elsewhere on his body too. His hair was loose and was just long enough to tumble over his slender shoulders to just past his collarbone and it tumbled over Jude’s knees where he lay content listening.

Jude had to smile, he’d always been attracted to men who were ‘pretty’ as opposed to handsome. Arden would have grown into a pretty youth had he lived, always delicate he had been. Yori had been beautiful in that classical regal elegance that always made him look almost haughty. Callan made them both pale. His beauty was natural and fresh like cherry blossoms in the springtime or freshly fallen snow on a clear midwinter day. His face was always serene and

you could tell by looking in his eyes how kind and genuine he was on the inside. He was truly a bright flower in Mane's moon garden, full of love and compassion and fragile as the blooms that blossomed only at night, shy beauty that hid from the sun and shared their fragrance with only the few who ventured into the night.

When Callan opened his large blue eyes and smiled up at Jude his breath hitched. That gaze of pure love was meant for him alone and Jude felt like the luckiest man alive. No one, not Arden and not Yori had ever looked at him the way Callan did and Jude ran his fingers through Callan's hair and returned the smile. "I will never tire looking at you Blossom."

"You make me so happy Jude. I cannot describe how I feel today."

"I hope I can make you feel this way every day. I will certainly try."

"You don't have to try Jude. I adore everything about you. None of those poems come close to describing my love for you. I could write my own and still not capture all I'd want to say." Callan said reaching up to lay a soft hand on Jude's cheek.

"How do I love you? You give me joy like the promise of spring when the flowers break free of the earth to paint the land in brilliant color. You make me content like a warm summer's day when the air is sultry and lazy in the heat. When the only sounds are the insects chirping in the cool grass like the heartbeat of the earth itself. You make me feel rich, like the leaves in autumn. Bold red, gold, orange and amber painting the season in opulence and warmth even when the air itself grows chill. You make me pause and hold my breath. Like the land when it's covered in a blanket of snow. Not dead, but waiting, sleeping under a cover of beauty. White and pure like a virgin waiting for a springtime lover. My love for you is like the seasons, there is no one way to describe it, because there are so many ways to love." Callan said and Jude felt a tear roll down his cheek, no one had ever said anything to him that filled his soul with such profound joy. No one had ever said he was loved before, not like that. There wasn't a poem in the book in his hands that came anywhere near the simple poem that fell from Callan's heart and lips.

The book tumbled from Jude's hands and he sobbed as he pulled Callan into his arms and held him close to his heart. He wept for joy into Callan's hair, drank in the lingering soft fragrance of his flower, reveled in the returned embrace and kissed whatever part of his blossom he could reach. He was too choked up to speak, he could only feel and he felt like he would burst from the love that swelled in his soul and threatened to rob him of breath. Nothing in the world meant more to him than this man in his arms, he'd fight tooth and nail to shelter and protect something so vastly precious. He would never be able to let go again.

“Callie.” Jude breathed at last, laying Callan back into the blankets and kissing him in desperate, needy passion. Callan half whimpered, half sobbed into the kiss, buried in Jude’s emotional explosion. Like a wild fire in dry grass he was swept away and captured in the moment, feeding off Jude’s love and feeling nothing else like a brick wall had encased him to protect him and shelter him, while at the same time within that barrier fires burned.

Callan’s very soul was devoured as his body was claimed again right there in the field under the old oak tree. His robe was pulled open and his legs hooked over Jude’s arms and Jude loved him feverishly. Callan would never grow weary of being loved by this man. Would never tire of being burned emotionally by Jude’s touch and would die soul lost without this man he craved wantonly and needed like he needed air to breathe. There was nothing else in the world, the world had become so very small and included only the two of them in that moment. The field was gone, the order didn’t exist, the book of poems never written, the sky was just a vague shade of endless blue above them and the ground just a place to lay. Only they lived and only they loved and when bodies became spent and exhaustion from a short night’s sleep and endless loving and emotional taxation claimed them, they slept in the shade of the oak tree, still oblivious to anything but each other.

The afternoon was warm and Callan and Jude were sleeping peacefully lost in the tall grass and never noticed another couple walking in the fields. Who spied the half dressed lovers sleeping. Callan’s robe left open, his beautiful body laid bare.

“Is that Callan?” One whispered and the other nodded.

“Aye, and Jude the new brother from the city. I’d heard quite a lot happened between them yesterday.”

“Obviously. I’m surprised Calanthe is allowing this. He never wants anyone to so much as talk to Callan let alone do what those two have been doing.”

“I heard Jude challenged Calanthe at mess yesterday and then went after Callan after he woke up from having his head bashed into the wall. Whatever happened, it looks like Jude won.”

“All the better for poor Callie. He’s been so lonely and I never knew he was so pretty under all those big robes he wears. Are those pearls on the blanket?”

“You know flower’s seed are pearls. They are supposed to be the only food Mane eats from Endymion. I asked Steffan once in biology if it was true and he said yes and that flower pearls to mortals are like the most potent aphrodisiac known to

mankind. They promote health, stamina, strengthen the heart and apparently once tasted are more addicting than narcotic drugs. It's why only mortal drones can eat them or are allowed to by their flowers."

"Lucky Jude then. Makes me wonder though what they taste like."

"Don't even dare, drones are notoriously possessive over flowers. Look at Sol and Mane over Endymion. If Gods will fight over a flower, mortals will kill over them. It's just best to leave these two alone. Besides look at them, they really do love each other."

"Flowers and Bees always do."

The couple left Jude and Callan to sleep and quietly snuck away leaving the lovers undisturbed in the shade.

The distant sounds of the dinner mess bell ringing roused Callan from his sleep and his smile was genuine as he looked at Jude still sleeping beside him. He was breathing deeply, with one arm possessively draped over Callan's middle, the other acting as Callan's pillow. Callan plucked a blade of grass and used it to tickle the end of Jude's nose. It did the trick and Jude opened sleepy eyes and smiled. "Hello beautiful." Jude yawned and Callan grinned.

"Good evening it is dearest. Mess bell just rang for dinner."

"Dinner time already?"

"Aye, we should get back I'm hungry and I know you are I can hear your stomach rumbling." Callan grinned sitting up and closing his robes where he'd been laying exposed. Lose pearls falling out of his robe and Jude reached over and plucked a few up and ate them grinning.

"I could live eating nothing but your pearls." He said truthfully and Callan laughed.

"Aye, you could, but I'd recommend you don't unless you desire to be in constant heat. It would be most uncomfortable on your body and I don't think my backside would like it much after a while."

Jude chuckled. "True and I have abused it already more than enough. Ready to go eat?"

Callan smiled and nodded and they packed up their picnic and headed back to the order arm in arm. Together, happy and ready to begin the next chapter of their lives. The drone and his moon flower in full bloom at last.