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ENG 498

April 21, 2024

The Ethereal Court Chronicles: Oceanic Odyssey

ECC:OO:

Chapter 1:**Do I have to save the world, or is it like optional?*****Ametrine's Journal***

Things have been crazy, and I've been journaling for a while. I really hope that this time it might help me unpack everything. In all honesty, I don't really know where to begin, and writing, specifically about my feelings, is not my strongest skill. Before I first met them, everything felt fine. Now I don't know how I feel. All I know is that one day I was preparing for exams, and now I'm not allowed to leave this place. This palace is now my prison. I'm doing everything in my power to make the most of it, but I'm ruining everything I touch. I try my best to get to know my family, and I'm pretty sure both my little brothers hate me. It's really not my fault, I don't even want to be here. They think I want Celestium to take over. I want to scream that I'm here against my will, but I can't do that. My brothers are both too young to understand, and even the older one is still two and a half years younger than me. I envied them, they got to live here with our parents, and their such little brats. Maybe it's a good thing they didn't raise me. I remember nothing, but being at the academy. Everything before age five is a blur. My memory is blocked. I used to draw a constant blank. I used to want answers, but after getting these I don't know if I want them. I hate it here! No one listens to what I want. Everyone just wants me to say 'yes' and keep it moving. I can't do that and I don't fit in here.

I just want to know if I have to save the world? It should be optional. They should find someone more qualified. How do they even know it's going to work? They don't.

I have nothing else right now. To say or feel. I just want to sleep, that's all I seem to want to do these days.

The room felt constricting, suffocating even, as the academy officials rushed to her with the life changing news. Ametrine was abruptly told that she had to make an emergency journey to the capital of the Amethyst nation. She was pulled from everything she knew, and had to journey into the unknown. Shock washed over her as she realized she was not prepared for this sudden upheaval. Forced to hastily pack her belongings, Ametrine felt as though a rope was tied tightly around her neck, choking her with uncertainty.

As she sat there frozen in shock, two pairs of eyes in the room focused intently on Ametrine. It took her lungs a while to adjust to the air of the outside world. The water being her primary residence, her eyes also struggled to adjust to the continuous light. The intensity of the ambiguity of this visit to the palace overwhelmed her, and she fought the urge to vomit. The concept of visiting the palace seemed foreign to her, as she had grown up believing her parents were dead or had just straight up abandoned her. The story was always muddled, so eventually, she forced herself to learn to push it all down.

In the Ethereal Court, where the Amethyst, Emerald, Sapphire, and Gold territories coexisted in a delicate balance, anticipation flowed freely through the air. Each territory had witnessed and participated in ancient rituals, forging a fragile truce that allowed them to call themselves allies, at the very least. The nations had formed to separate the responsibilities of the world, with Mermorphic ancestors pledging their allegiance and the territories accepting the power and protective hold of their Celestials, albeit without fully considering the consequences of their decisions. As the sun slowly sank below the horizon, layers of amber and gold enveloped the Court, both land and sea.

“Why’d you leave me here only to come back when you need something from me?” The words slipped out of Ametrine's mouth, and she silently cursed herself for not thinking before speaking. Silence hung heavily in the room, amplifying the pounding of her heart in her throat. She closed her eyes, trying to gather herself, determined not to let any tears fall. She felt that they didn’t deserve her tears.

“It was for your protection, there are things you don’t know...” Queen Violet of the Amethyst kingdom spoke, pulling Ametrine out of her thoughts. Ametrine struggled to contain her frustration, having no desire to be the ‘chosen one’ in her life. She thought about how it wasn’t for her protection, and was certain that it was for theirs. She didn’t say it though, keeping it to herself.

“If I do this, will you promise that I get a position in the delivery department of the information league, and then never talk to me again?” Ametrine blurted out, her eyes widening at her own words. She felt like she couldn’t control anything she said around them, the room thick with unresolved emotions and secrets.

The annual seven-day Unity Festival of Connection, was an event bursting with a vibrant array of colors, showcasing each territory’s cherished traditions. The atmosphere burst with wave energy as mermorphs from every territory and faction mingled, their voices blending with the rhythmic crash of waves teasing the golden sand on the shore. It was a celebration of unity, symbolizing the respect they all shared for the mystical forces that bound their nations together. As the festivities approached, the Ethereal Court thrived, highlighting their efforts of harmony within the oceanic world. Their world is separated like one big island, having different types and temperatures of water, divided by various types of land and ecosystems.

Within the beauty of the Ethereal Court, a thick, ominous fog lingered, hiding secrets and casting doubt. This darkness cast a subtle shadow over the fragile allegiances built throughout the territories, shaking their already unstable foundations. In the heart of the Gold Kingdom, whispers swirled like a cloud of smoke, clouding and shifting through the air. Rumors, fueled by the alleged disappearance of Elio, the true heir to the Gold Kingdom, and their Celestium, spread unchecked, building up like a wildfire.

The waves of uncertainty trickled down to the citizens of the Court, their whispers flowing like an evening breeze, crossing boundaries and reaching the ears of those in distant territories and factions. Even with the might of their massive and extremely powerful army, a looming threat hung by a thread, over the Gold Kingdom. Most territories kept their suspicions and theories to themselves, fearing they'd disrupt and shake the fragile balance of the Ethereal Court's delicate alliance. Ametrine looked at her hands, contemplating whether or not she should apologize.

But before she could form words, King Eirian jumped in. "That job's not fit for you, my daughter's not..." His words sparked anger in Ametrine, and she cut him off.

"I'm not your daughter!" she exclaimed, pointing her finger in the king's face. The king was too stunned to respond. "Or yours!" She turned to the Queen, meeting her eyes, both filled with rage. These Mermorphs had forced their way into her life, as if they were entitled to a relationship with her. She was not going to let their betrayal be something that could be overlooked.

“He means that you don’t need to work that type of job, you’re going to take over for us. As our heir,” Queen Violet clarified, avoiding the word daughter, knowing how it upset Ametrine but still taking as much control over her as possible. She dismissed the king with a look, signaling that she could handle it.

Bitter laughter comes from Ametrine, filling the room with even more tension. “Then why didn’t I grow up here, with you? Nobody told me anything... You don’t understand how it feels? I don’t want to take over for you, I don’t want anything to do with you two...” Her words hung in the air, a thick silence settling over the room like an angry fog, deepening the divide between all of them.

“Don’t you have two little boys? No one even knows I exist. I am the best-kept secret of this Kingdom, and maybe even the whole court!” Ametrine’s frustration grew with each word leaving their mouths, like a thick poison in the air. She tried to rise, but a strange force locked her in place, forcing her to be seated and confused.

Queen Violet’s attitude and words hit Ametrine like a stone. She realized the queen was making her stay in her seat, she was silenced by her shock and curiosity. Even though she sat in the thick fog of tension and resentment, a flicker of interest lit up within her, she tried her hardest to hide it. But it eased its way out. Queen Violet released her hold, allowing Ametrine to move, but she remained seated in shocked silence, making the Queen finally feel ready to continue.

“There’s a ritual that you have to perform soon at the unity festival. Listen, no one else in the court knows this, but Elio of the Gold Kingdom is missing, and you’re right,” Ametrine’s face scrunched up in confusion, but the queen continued, “You are my best-kept secret, and that’s why I need you. Solvi, his younger brother, can’t perform the ritual; the Celestium is tied

to the firstborn.” She finished, gauging Ametrine’s reaction. The silence of her unpacking gave her a moment to truly take her daughter in.

They shared a lot of similarities; their eyes were both a mauve color, but her daughter's seemed somewhat dull, but full of curiosity. Both had smooth, rosy brown skin, and her daughter's face reminded the queen of herself when she was that age. Even with Ametrine biting her bottom lip, she still had the plump shape, and it’s two tones. Their similarities stopped at the hair. The queen had her hair braided up into a bun, each strand neatly placed. Ametrine’s hair was pulled up in a puff slightly off-center, as if she was in a rush, probably because she was.

The weight of her mother’s words settled in the pit of her stomach; Ametrine couldn’t shake an odd feeling, but she swallowed it down.

Still contemplating how to respond, a question popped into her head. “So, am I going back to the academy until this ritual?”

Queen Violet was a little shocked at her question, but she quickly composed herself. “Of course not! I don’t have a lot of time to prepare you for the ritual, and the festival is coming up too. I also need you here now.” The last part was rushed out. Ametrine stood up and started pacing the room a little, her legs shaky from not using them very often.

“I didn’t even get to say goodbye, and I’m going to be gone for like a month, all my friends... everyone I know is gonna think I’m dead or something!”

“Ametrine, baby, you’re not going back there, at least not any time soon, even when the festival and ritual are done. You could probably visit in about a year, but I need you.” They both stood silently staring at each other, Ametrine felt like her world was just shattered into a million tiny pieces, and that her heart was ripped from her chest, and stomped on. She made her way back to the chair, suddenly feeling extremely dizzy.

“I know this is a lot to take in...”

“You know nothing! You decide to just swoop in, and take over my life!” The yelling made Ametrine’s dizziness worsen, and she fell unconscious; her mother quickly grabbed her daughter, shaking her, trying to get a response. She knew all this information would probably overwhelm her, but she also knew that part of all this was due to the magic dying and that the ritual needed to be complete, so they could still conceal the monsters lurking, but they hoped they were still locked in the depths.

Luckily, the Gold Kingdom has close ties with the Amethyst Kingdom and has a very persuasive and commanding influence over information and access to it. Manipulating narratives that shape perceptions across the whole Court, they are historians and have enhanced intelligence and observation skills, allowing them to build intricate tales that captivate and control. They are bound by the treaties of the Ethereal Court, so they meticulously curate specific images for each territory, ensuring that, at the very least, on the surface, appears pristine. With a carefully crafted education to reinforce their narratives, influencing the Court like a sculptor shaping clay. Some of the others live near the palace, most of those being staff for the palace. Beneath the surface is where most of the Amethyst Kingdom’s citizens live, using transport tunnels to navigate the depths.

Realizing that she was unresponsive, Queen Violet lifted Ametrine up and took her to the room she had prepared for her daughter’s arrival. Everything was kept under wraps. Things happened so fast that some of her initial plans were halted. In order to protect the future of the court. Her sons didn’t even fully know of their older sister’s return yet. They thought she went to a boarding school to get princess training and were always taught not to mention her in public conversation. The queen had a small suspicion they figured out that she was coming soon, but it

wasn't enough for her to act on their curiosity. She knew that they snuck into her room. She tried her hardest to stop them, explaining that when she arrived she might want space, but it was all harmless at this point. The queen made a mental note to make sure she had someone collect her daughter's belongings from the academy. Laying her down, she wrote a quick note, allowing Ametrine some space and necessary rest.

When Ametrine woke up, her heart was beating quickly, racing in her chest. She didn't remember how she got here. The room was unfamiliar to her; she looked around, the only light coming from the moon. After a moment of adjusting to the environment, she remembered almost everything, memories started flooding through. The information came at her like a massive wave again, and after realizing she was alone, she allowed herself to cry, ultimately crying herself to sleep.

The Sapphire Kingdom originally built transport tunnels to travel from their freezing waters to the center of the Ethereal Court; transport tunnels became the main type of transportation through each of the realms. What began as a simple solution was built into a network of arteries pulsating at the center of the main Kingdoms, becoming the mainline of community and communication, binding the territories together in a web, the center of the court being the heart. After the tunnels were built, more citizens of different nations were connecting and learning about each other's cultures. The kingdom relied on innovation to ensure they were seen as useful to the Ethereal Court, but none of the kingdoms solidified their usefulness more consistently than the Emerald Kingdom. There's a silent competition between the Sapphire and Emerald nations, but because of the treaty, they never fully act on it. That doesn't stop it from coming into play when social situations happen; both of them spend time trying to one-up each other, presenting new inventions and advancements every year at the Unity Festival.

The next time she woke up, the sun was peeking through the window. Ametrine took some time taking in the room; it was bright, but still felt lifeless to her. It was much bigger than her old room, so she felt that there wasn't really anything to complain about. Still, though, to her, the room felt uninviting. She felt like an afterthought. With trembling hands, Ametrine pushed herself upright, the heaviness in her chest making it difficult to breathe, that and her lack of being on land this long. There was a sense of dread that surrounded her. The brightness from the window cast a warm golden hue over the room. Ametrine tried to deal with all her new emotions, anger, betrayal, and confusion boiled within her, settling throughout her very being, threatening to consume her.

Yet, within her turmoil, a sense of acceptance began to slowly settle within her. She swallowed, trying to clear her head. Her throat felt dry from crying. She weighed her options and was beginning to fully realize that she couldn't run away from her fate, no matter how much she wanted to escape it and go back to her old life. For better or for worse, she decided to embrace whatever destiny awaited and realized that she truly had no choice but to confront it head-on.

The Emerald Kingdom lies the heart of sustenance for the Ethereal Court, where agricultural fields and sprawling animal sanctuaries flourish in perceived harmony. Yet, beneath the surface of beauty and tranquility, the legacy of sea monsters' past control casts a dark shadow over the very delicate balance of nature, driving some species to near extinction and forcing others to adapt to unfamiliar realms. The Emerald Kingdom's crops have the luxury to grow inside of and near freshwater, their continued abundance a testament to the kingdom's comfort and knowledge of agriculture. Innovation blooms, showcased in their most well-known creation: the Seafarebars. They're plant-based meals that not only nourish all the different types of Mermorphics, salt, ice, and fresh. They are even able to be enjoyed on land. Although most

individuals on land are vegetarians, they stay away from them. They also serve as a beacon of sustainability since they are sustainable, even underneath the waves. They embrace a philosophy of little to no interference. The Emerald Kingdom's main goal is the thriving of the aquatic ecosystem, some of their ancient beliefs are that we invaded the waves when the land became too difficult. They work hard to foster the very delicate equilibrium where every creature finds its place in the intricate, yet beautiful web of life.

Ametrine didn't really understand what a land dweller's bedroom is supposed to look like. She recognized most things, for example, the bed and window, and the drawers. She stood up and started to explore more of the room; there was a desk, a few feet to the right of her bed, and on the right, there was a bedside table. It had a journal, which she had a version underwater, but the feeling of this type of paper was foreign to her. She flipped through the empty pages, feeling how smooth it was. For a moment, her curiosity was piqued, allowing her to be distracted from the intensity even if only for a moment. She was pulled out of her focus when she heard fast-paced footsteps coming down the hall. Ametrine jumped, causing her to get a small paper cut on her index finger. It was her first one so she didn't really know how to react. In the water, if she accidentally cut herself it would flow around, but on land it was barely even noticeable.

Throughout the rich history of the Ethereal Court, smaller sub-kingdoms formed and existed like cities, bridging gaps and expanses between certain nations. Over the years of coexistence and periods of both ancient and current peace, these sub-kingdoms seamlessly integrated into the larger parts of the Court, becoming essential components of its continuous growth. While these factions did not create any new Celestiums, they did create a large number of smaller, somewhat unofficial groups that have their own sub-cultures built upon the mixing of other kingdom's pre-established cultural traditions and identities. Each of them adds their own

unique contributions to the major parts of the Court's climate. A few of these include the Silver, Moonstone, Topaz, and Turquoise. There are many more, but some are hard to track. Especially considering that new factions continue to emerge and absorb into the Ethereal Court. They are primarily called factions. They are a showcase of how the Ethereal Court can live in harmony and unity through multiple types of collaboration. There's a palpable sense of excitement lingering in the air, mingling with the sweet and salty breeze that swept through the gathering preparations.

She quickly put the journal back on the desk, taking a seat on the bed and looking toward the entrance of the room. Then she saw two sets of eyes staring back at her. She immediately recognized them both as her brothers. Ametrine didn't know them personally, but almost every little thing they did was broadcast to the Ethereal Court. The youngest one, Reign, had the same tone as her, but he looked like an exact mix of both their parents. No one could question that this child was theirs. His hair was braided back, and he gave Ametrine a small, but excited smile. It reached his eyes, and he was practically jumping at the door.

"I'm Reign!" he said, happily introducing himself, making his way into her room, causing Ametrine to stand up. "Woah, you have a tattoo! Did it hurt? Was princess training like fun?"

Ametrine's eyebrows creased together for just a second, rubbing the tattoo on her shoulder subconsciously. She had no idea what 'princess training' was, but she figured out pretty quickly by her youngest brother's innocence that it was probably another lie her parents told. Not wanting to rock the boat or cause anymore scenes, she mentally locked the information into the back of her head for later, playing along while smiling at Reign.

“Well, Reign, I’m Ametrine. My tattoo didn’t hurt, and princess training was pretty cool.” Reign got closer to her and opened his arms up for a hug. She quickly returned it, having to bend down to match his height. While they embraced one another, she looked up and saw her other brother, Taji, just staring at her. Ametrine didn’t know what his problem was, but she pushed it down and ignored it. Reign let go of her, and she stood up straight.

“Hey Reign, go tell Mom that Ametrine is awake,” Taji said, causing Reign to practically run out of the room. “Not everyone is happy you’re here, you know?” He was still leaning on the entrance. Ametrine walked a little closer to him while biting back with an immediate rebuttal,

“That makes at least two of us. It’s nice to meet you too, Taji.” His eyes widened, but he quickly recovered and rolled his eyes. If Ametrine is practically a clone of her mother, Taji is his father’s son, no doubt. Same demeanor and mannerisms.

“You don’t look like a princess.” Now it was Ametrine’s turn to roll her eyes.

“Oh really, what does a princess look like?” He took a step back and looked her up and down.

“Not like you...you look...” Before he could finish his thought a voice cut in.

“Taji! Apologize to your sister!” Queen Violet’s voice crashed through the tension of the room.

Across the borders secluded from the Ethereal Court, the Ruby Kingdom keeps up its ancient customs, shielding its citizens from the outside world and preserving their legacies and beliefs all a mystery to the other territories. There’s a lingering and haunting memory of the Onyx Kingdom, seemingly lost to the depths of the sea during the first ritual, used as a cautionary tale of the consequences of anyone who went against the important tradition. No one truly knows what the Onyx Kingdom is known for, but the history books say their vision is

enhanced in the dark on land and sea, contrasting the majority Ethereal Court, whose eyesight is at its strongest in water.

The night settles, while the full moon casts a bright, yet soft glow upon the entire Court, a sense of urgency building up within the Ethereal Court. The fate of their world as they know it hangs on by a thread. Unbeknownst to them, there are forces far beyond their comprehension and control conspiring in the shadows, threatening to unravel the already delicate balance of peace that binds them together. The harsh whispers and weight of uncertainty bubble up and mingle with the gentle rustle of the waves, ancient powers, misunderstood and forgotten realities, and the inevitable journey of destiny that will shape the fate of the Court's reality for generations to come.

ECC:OO:

Chapter 2:

I don't know. I just live here.

Both siblings were shocked at their mother's sudden appearance, but Ametrine was shocked because she was looking towards the entrance, and felt that she should've noticed her presence. She brushed it off thinking that her observational skills were just off. Her presence was intimidating, Ametrine noticed the frustrated look on her face, it seemed like she was somewhat shocked at her oldest son's behavior.

"Whatever, I'm sorry," Taji said, turning around, and trying to walk out the door. Their mother simply put her hand up stopping him in his tracks, Ametrine remembered this ability from earlier.

"The festival is in two days, and Taj, whether you like it or not we will be a united front. I'm not going to have your antics embarrass me, or this Kingdom. The whole Court is anticipating my announcement, so be nice to your sister!" Queen Violet said, standing inside of Ametrine's room, right next to Taji, after Reign told her that she was awake.

"What announcement?" The queen turned to look at Ametrine, and took a few steps in the room, releasing her hold on Taji. Causing him to cross his arms. Queen Violet immediately waved her hand again, and his arms were uncrossed.

"Fix your attitude, and go get your father and brother, we're going to have a family meeting after I help Ametrine get dressed." Taji was happy to just get out of the room and he stormed away extremely angry.

The queen took a couple deep breaths, and smiled at Ametrine, “We have to make an official announcement of your arrival at the festival. Then I can relinquish my Celestium.” Amerine’s eyebrows creased together, but she nodded her head.

“What’s princess training, and why do Reign and Taji think that’s where I was?”

“Straight to business. I wouldn’t expect anything less, follow me.”

The queen started walking out of the room, with Ametrine trailing closely behind. She barely had time to take in the beauty of the architecture. There were so many small intricate designs on the wall, causing Ametrine to smile to herself at the scene. She thought that maybe living here wouldn’t be so bad. The halls were a maze, but she did notice some tunnels along the way, the queen noticed how long Ametrine stared at them,

“Don’t think about it. I promise We can get you into some water soon, I’d love to see your tail.” Ametrine blinked a couple times, fighting the urge to roll her eyes.

They made their way further down the maze of the palace, the queen entered a room, guiding her daughter in. It was a closet, everything was organized, and labeled. Nothing looked out of place. Ametrine thought it looked like a store, her eyes widening at the different pieces in the room. Her nose scrunched up at the sight of shoes. Not many Mermorphs wore shoes, unless the terrain required it, and Ametrine had never personally been anywhere that shoes would be necessary. She explored the space further, noticing a flowy dress hanging in the far back she put the silky fabric between her fingers, absent-mindedly exploring the texture. She thought about how no one would be able to swim in this, which was strange to her since most clothes throughout the entire Court had to support land and sea activities.

The emerald kingdom came up with natural solutions using plants and binding things of that nature together, the Gold Kingdom didn’t necessarily have that problem, the majority of

them wore land-only clothing, shoes included. The Sapphire kingdom used specialized suits for Mermorphs that could sustain the cold waters, and immediately be safe for any land-specific activities. The Amethyst kingdom had a mix of how their clothes were produced. There was a stark contrast in their land and sea attire. Ametrine wasn't really familiar with the land clothes because she lived primarily in the water and at the academy, they had a hybrid system in place to make sure everyone learned the basics on land, but Ametrine wasn't very good at it, she craved being in the sea.

"Do you want to wear that on the first festival day?" Ametrine jumped a little, at the voice letting go of the fabric, looking over at Queen Violet, she stayed silent. She sighed when her daughter didn't respond. She knew that at some point they were going to have to have some tough conversations, but for now, she just wanted to spend time with her daughter. "I'm happy you're back, and eventually I will tell you everything. I know I haven't done much for you to trust me, but *I need you*, please try."

"It's a nice dress, but I've never worn anything like that." Ametrine smiled a small smile, not meeting her eyes. Causing the queen's eyes to light up.

"It's nice not being the only girl in here, sometimes your brother's and father's can be intense." Ametrine nodded, looking at the other stuff in the closet. The queen silently beamed at the fact that her daughter didn't get angry at her including her in the family.

"Yeah, Reign's sweet, though."

Queen Violet smiled at that, not mentioning that Reign can be a menace sometimes. She walked through the closet looking for something that Ametrine could wear that would make her comfortable. "Here, and you can come in here, and take anything at any time. Your stuff from the academy should arrive later today." She passed her some things she could swim in but was

still appropriate for walking around on land. Queen Violet never got rid of any of her old clothes, even if she couldn't fit something. She had been waiting for the longest to collect things for Ametrine, and now she could finally truly be able to give her everything.

"Thanks," Ametrine said, taking the clothes.

"Alright, you can clean up in your room, there's a bathroom. I'll come get you in a little bit." The queen said while walking Ametrine back. Before she left, she took a quick look around the room, "When the festival is over, we're decorating this room. I'm sorry."

"It's cool, thanks again."

Ametrine walked back inside, putting the clothes away. Picking something she liked. Walking into the bathroom she was a bit overwhelmed. She knew the basics of land hygiene, but things were different in the sea. Ametrine got dressed, and she contemplated how to do her hair. Usually, she did everything in her power to avoid having it in her face, but since she was on land she really didn't need to put her hair up. Now she didn't have to, so she put a little water in it, and let her curls flow. Then she sat on her bed waiting for her mother to come back.

After a little while of sitting, she heard footsteps. She assumed it was probably her mother, but was surprised to see her father, King Eirian, and her brother Taji. They both looked at her, and she had a pit in her stomach, she didn't know why they were there.

"I'm really sorry for being mean to you," Taji said, with sincerity lacing his voice. Ametrine's eyebrows creased a little, but she recovered her shock by blinking a couple of times. Her father cleared his throat and took a deep breath. He didn't say anything, but Ametrine took his look as a silent apology. She had a feeling there would be a conversation with him later.

Ametrine appreciated the gesture, she almost wanted to cry thinking about how close they all were. It made her feel like more of an outsider, she blinked her tears back and nodded at them both, “Thanks for apologizing. I accept.”

They stayed in silence for a few moments, when Reign walked in, causing them all to look at him. “Mom told me to get you guys, she wants us all to eat together.”

They all walked out. Ametrine followed them, and Reign stayed next to her trying to make conversation. She tried to keep up with his questions, but she was still a little overwhelmed. Ametrine didn’t even think about how hungry she truly was. She was dealing with so many emotions that she didn’t even realize it.

They all made their way into the dining room, it was intimate and only had five places. Ametrine thought there would be plenty of staff roaming around, but then she realized they were probably all preparing for the festival. So she just ignored it and sat at the seat closest to her mother. They didn’t really say much, and Ametrine wasn’t entirely used to the food she recognized very little on her plate, avoiding anything she didn’t immediately recognize. Ametrine observed their conversations, they were brief and casual but didn’t feel forced. A small part of her craved that type of relationship with her family. The other part wanted to run away, and never see these mermorphs again.

“Ametrine, do you not like the food?” Her mother snapped her out of her conflicting thoughts. A little concerned about the fact that her daughter was playing with her food,

“Nothing’s wrong. I’m not really that hungry, and I’m not used to eating a lot of this stuff.” She figured that maybe it had something to do with her being acclimated to a new environment. So she brushed it off, and dismissed her daughter, noticing her discomfort, and Ametrine left.

“Does she hate us?” Reign asked, almost immediately after Ametrine left. The queen could still hear lingering footsteps and knew that she most likely heard the question.

“Of course not. She’s just tired, and not used to eating this type of food, she’s used to different stuff.” Reign nodded his head, going back to eating his food. They finished eating and went their separate ways.

The day before the festival was a bit of a blur for Ametrine, everything was moving so fast. Queen Violet helped her come up with some festival outfits. She also made sure to clue Ametrine in on the ritual and proper steps for everything. She braided her daughter’s hair, enjoying their quality time together. Ametrine was just happy that she didn’t have to do her own hair, so she didn’t mind playing happy family if it meant she got to relax and allow others to take over tasks for her. The festival is tomorrow and everyone is in a good mood, so Ametrine didn’t want to dampen it, she was excited to be able to attend the entire festival. All seven days, usually she would have to do her exams, so she was lucky if she caught a couple days. Queen Violet explained to her that the ritual hadn’t been done since she was around Ametrine’s age, so she was really excited about being able to be a witness to it.

Even though Elio is still missing the queen came up with a genius idea of having it be a masked theme, she always released these themes super close to the event so that building a costume or prop could be an activity at the festival. Another way to use each Kingdom’s cultural traditions. It’s all about unity and togetherness. Even though beneath that surface there’s truly a lack of harmony and just a showcase of tolerance. She figured the public wouldn’t have any idea, while they got a team together to search for Elio, they had to perform this ritual on the seventh day or else there could be world-damaging consequences. The queen didn’t really understand the

full scope of what could go wrong, but she pretended she did to maintain some social control over the Court.

The next day rolled around a little too quickly for both Queen Violet, and Ametrine's liking, they both had a lot riding on this event, and there was a lot of pressure placed on both of them for perfection. Everyone else was extremely excited and ready to enjoy the festivities. As everyone was putting the finishing touches on everything, each of the leaders of the Ethereal Court had to meet, before the start of the festival, and all walk out together. This shows unity, and also approachability. This was the first time the others would meet, Ametrine.

All the leaders of the Ethereal Court and their children are heirs, along with Solvi. Made their way to the Vault. Only authorized Mermorphs are allowed inside. It holds the threads of what's holding the Court together. Ametrine was nervous, she made its way from her stomach into her throat. It didn't help that she didn't eat anything because of how overwhelmed she felt. Also, the fact that because the festival was so close she has not had time to turn. She swallowed her emotions down because she thought about how at least she was not dizzy, which is the first sign of being hydro-recessive.

The Amethyst Kingdom, specifically, The leaders, and their daughter walked inside first. Solvi followed closely after. Elio was missing, and their parents died suddenly when they were children, along with Olivine, and her mother, Queen Jade, the current leader of the Peridot Kingdom. The king passed away a little under a year ago, but no one in the Court talked about it because of how suspicious the circumstances were. The final territory is the Sapphire Kingdom, Aquamarine, and their parent's King's Cyan and Capri.

“Now that everyone has arrived, we have a couple things to discuss, before we walk out there, and pretend we like each other.” Queen Violet paused looking around at everyone. “Or at the very least not hate each other.”

It took everything in Ametrine not to scream, cry, or laugh. The intensity of the room was so thick it felt like there was a boulder hanging over them, being held up by a thread.

“Maybe you should go first since your news is the biggest.” Queen Jade, turned to look at Ametrine, causing all eyes to set on her. “Always one-upping everyone.” King Capri jumped in. Ametrine ignored them, and sat up straight, shifting in her seat. She blinked a couple of times and kept a calm expression on her face. But on the inside, she felt like the world was closing in on itself. She wanted to disappear, being anything, but here.

“Well, this is Ametrine, my oldest. I think it’s only fair that she get a proper ceremony for the relinquishing of my celestium.” Queen Violet walked over to her daughter and whispered a few words, Ametrine didn’t catch them, but suddenly her eyes closed. The heat took over her body, and when she opened her eyes it was like a bright fog took over, and when it cleared Ametrine absentmindedly rubbed her hand. Her eyes widened at the sight of a stone sitting on the top of her left hand. Ametrine recovered quickly, remembering her mother talking about this process, but nothing could prepare her for it. She was happy that it was intimate, and over quickly. She was also comfortable with the fact that only celestium holders and previous holders could see it so that she could still blend in with the citizens of the Court. She took a couple deep breaths, and everyone remained silent. Until she stood up and lifted her hand, the celestium facing the leaders of the court. The others lifted theirs, and the ceremony was officially over.

“Alright now that that’s done, I’ll go next.” Queen Jade, cut it, annoyed that the attention wasn’t on her.

King Capri jumped in before the Peridot Kingdom could reveal their latest innovation. “If it’s more kids we can move on.”

Queen Jade ignored him and continued. “It’s not.” She paused for a brief moment, collecting her thoughts. “My child has come up with a solution for all the waste.”

Olivine perked up being excited that their mother finally gave her credit for an idea. She cleared her throat and stood up, causing all eyes to go on them. “Well because of all the shipwrecks, and construction waste, we are potentially at risk of losing a few species.” They paused looking a little nervous, “I came up with a solution, for a while now Peridot Kingdom has been using it to rebuild underwater dwellings, closer to land. This allows for the water to remain pure, and makes sure none of the recyclable goods go to waste or kill anything, and if you get hydorecessive, then the water is close enough to turn.” Olivine finished, not really enjoying the public speaking.

Ametrine locked eyes with her and almost looked away, but they smiled at her, so she returned it. After that they moved on to the Sapphire Kingdom, Aquamarine didn’t wait for an introduction, they immediately stood up, and started. Since their advancements contrasted so much. It was like the response was on autopilot, and a rebuttal needed to cut through.

“Well we’ve also been working on innovation using recycled materials, but we belong underwater just like every other creature. At the very least we should be given a choice.” They paused briefly, Ametrine looked at Aquamarine and Olivine. It made her feel like she was between old friends at the academy, shocked at how informal and petty everyone was.

“Using the materials that are already underwater, we have been building some underwater neutral zones that intentionally avoid other aquatic life interference, but allow us to have our rightful space. There’s no reason that we can’t all exist in harmony, land or water.”

They ended their presentation. Ametrine thought about the fact that this was done every year and that it was a bit of a waste of time. She kept her thoughts to herself and glanced over at Solvi, who hadn't said anything. He just sat there with an annoyed look on his face. Queen Violet cleared her throat and looked over at Solvi, he looked just as out of place as Ametrine. He blinked a couple of times, before joining in.

"I'm Solvi, and Elio is missing, so..." before he could finish Queen Jade stood up,

"You're telling me a celestium is missing! What's going to happen to the magic?" Queen Violet, slightly annoyed at her outburst, jumped in,

"The magic is fine," she paused, "For now, but as long as we complete the ritual on the last night, everything will be alright. Mermorphs don't just disappear, especially high-profile ones. Someone knows about his whereabouts, and when we find him. I'm sure Elio will explain everything." The room seemed content with her answer, so no one said anything else, for a moment.

"Well if that is all, let's all walk out, and officially begin this festival." With that everyone put their masks on, and walked out into the center of the Court, officially announcing the beginning of the unity festival. Everyone dispersed to go enjoy their time.

Until Queen Violet called back all three celestium holders and Solvi. The teens were all nervous, but they tried not to let it show. The festival was all about letting loose and being able to explore the cultures of the Ethereal Court. They quickly, but stealthily made their way back to the Vault. They sat down, and Queen Violet looked at the four of them, mentally preparing herself to reveal her intentions.

ECC:OO:

Chapter 3:

I'm just here so I don't get fined.

Solvi stared out the window, watching the festival being set up. He was trying to focus on anything but the fact that his older brother was missing. He was nervous about what this could mean for the Gold Kingdom. His brother was much better at leading, and he didn't think there would ever be a situation where he would be forced to take over. Even if it was only supposed to be temporary. In fact, Solvi hated the annual festival, but he endured it because Elio loved being around everyone. Solvi always hated how social Elio was, it made him look at him as weak. Their kingdom was built of strength and intimidation, but Elio was always soft on everyone, he stopped producing weapons. Became much more relaxed about training, and even forced Solvi to take breaks from it. There wasn't much Solvi could do in terms of arguing with his brother since when their parents died it made Elio silently in charge.

Queen Violet did everything in her power to ensure that both of them were taken care of, she knew everything about everyone in the Ethereal Court. She also liked using their army as leverage in her more secretive endeavors. Elio didn't want Solvi involved in any of it, so he had little to no knowledge of the Gold Kingdom's inner workings. Elio wanted him to be able to choose his own destiny, but unluckily for Elio, who was more like his mother. His little brother was his father, with a worse temper and an even worse attitude. There was no doubt that Solvi could one day become a great leader of an army, but a kingdom would be pushing it. He took things personally and let rage blind his decision-making. Which is why the court must figure out his disappearance.

Solvi walked into Elio's bedroom and headed straight to his closet. Queen Violet told him to look in there since what he usually wore wouldn't cut it for the festival, little did he know she was more focused on trying to have him blend in, Elio and Solvi are close enough in height, where it wouldn't impact the public perception too much when he wore a mask. Solvi picked through Elio's closet, but it made him feel guilty.

Solvi and Elio had their differences, and this plan could easily backfire. Their height, and deep brown skin was pretty much the only thing the two had in common. Solvi wore his hair in braids to the back, while Elio liked to let his afro fall freely. Elio had dark brown eyes like their father, while Solvi had light brown eyes favoring their mother. The two couldn't be more opposite, but Solvi wanted to do everything in his power to make sure this plan worked as well as it could.

He always told his brother to leave him alone, and that he didn't want to be around him. He knew that sometimes it hurt Elio, but his brother was too happy, and he was the opposite. He didn't understand how he could move on after finding out about what actually happened to their parents. Everyone in the Court was devastated by the news, and it wasn't really a common occurrence. The Peridot Kingdom was hiding something about the death of their King. No one was even allowed to talk about it, but because he didn't talk much, Mermorphs felt comfortable airing out their business. Being unapproachable came with its perks for Solvi.

He had never been authorized to go inside The Vault. Solvi was nervous about it, Elio never mentioned what the meetings were about. Solvi hated the unknown, he had a plan for everything. When everyone stepped in he realized how little he actually knew about what was going on in the court, initially, he felt a little bit behind everyone else. Until he laid his eyes on Ametrine, he had no idea who she was, but she looked so out of place. It made him feel like the

exclusivity of The Vault was just something Elio told him to avoid having him mess things up in the kingdom. He was looking around and realized that this place was just a storage facility, each of the Courts had a different section, and there were also some group matters, and things of that nature. In the center, there's a big table. More formal than a dining room, but less formal than an office.

Solvi wasn't paying much attention, simply in awe of the Vault, he grew up so curious about the space, and he really couldn't figure out its significance. It looks so basic to him.

"...this is Ametrine, my oldest." Now this piqued his interest, and he wondered why Queen Violet held onto her celestium. He figured it was another weird Amethyst tradition of waiting until someone was of age, but a whole person was hidden away from everyone. He didn't know how she could keep a secret that big for years, he was barely hanging on thinking about Elio. He thought about what else Queen Violet could possibly be hiding, but he shoved the thought down to save it for another, more reasonable time. This meeting just made him hate the festival more, there was nothing unified about the Ethereal Court, but its name.

Queen Violet gathered the celestium holders and Solvi back into the vault. They were all a little nervous, and on edge. Not really knowing what she could possibly want from them, especially if it can't be stated in front of their parents. She paced a little bit, and everyone looked at each other. Not knowing what to do. Queen Violet just looked at all of them, deep in thought.

"So as you all know this is my daughter." She pointed at Ametrine, causing them to nod, and keep it moving still confused, "No one else does, and we're going to keep it that way. That information stays in here." She finished, making it known no one in that room was revealing anything to anyone.

Ametrine figured she had something to do with her, she had only been announced to the leaders of the Court. No one else even knew she had arrived back, and Ametrine didn't figure that it was done on purpose. She thought maybe her mother was ashamed of the secret. In all reality the queen wanted to control the narrative, she had to figure out a way to make herself look good in all this, and revealing it offhandedly at a festival was not the way. After that, she dismissed Aquamarine and Olivine, and they rushed to get away from each other. Their kingdoms couldn't find a way to meet in the middle, and they didn't have to like each other. They just had to pretend to. It reminded Ametrine of getting in trouble at the academy, and then being released, just to go get into more trouble. Ametrine lingered behind a little, along with Queen Violet, and Solvi.

Solvi and Ametrine had great neutral faces, no one would be able to tell what they were going through emotionally. "So I have a letter from your brother." After that bomb was dropped it was over for Solvi his whole facial expression, Ametrine didn't react but she was just as stunned at her mother's confession. She pulled out the note, and Solvi had anticipation in his eyes, he wanted to read what his brother wrote, but the queen looked over at Ametrine, who already felt awkward about the fact that she was sitting in this room. Listening to business that she had nothing to do with.

"I asked you to stay because the academy told me about how good you are at deciphering messages, maybe Elio said something important in code."

"It's none of her business...I don't want a stranger reading it. How can you trust her?" Solvi cut it, Ametrine was tired of everyone acting like she was the problem. In all honesty, she agreed with him, though. She really wanted no part of this, and it seemed that every moment she was here she had more and more questions. At the academy things were easy,

she had structure and a schedule. Here Ametrine had no clue what was happening but always seemed to be in the middle of something that had nothing to do with her.

“It’s fine. If he isn’t comfortable, don’t force him.” Ametrine felt bad for even intruding in the first place, but now she had become sick to her stomach, with the feeling of being used. It hurt worse when she settled that this was why her mother wanted her to return, she didn’t have time to unpack her whirlwind of emotions, but she tried to get out of there as soon as possible.

“I know I can trust her Solvi, nothing leaves the vault, not this not, or this conversation.” Queen Violet said, and that persuaded Solvi enough to allow Ametrine to look over the note, even though he only would accept her deciphering it if he read it first. The Amethyst kingdom’s queen handed him the note. He had a barely noticeable shake in his hands, but he composed himself and prepared for whatever could possibly be in the note. Solvi didn’t know if he was expecting an explanation, or if it was going to be an apology. He couldn’t think about what else it could possibly be. He slowly opened it, and read through the contents, he recognized his brother’s handwriting immediately. He was surrounded by a brief sense of comfort being able to read through his brother’s words, when he was content, he handed it to Ametrine.

She gave him a small smile and began to quickly analyze the document, she didn’t know anything about Elio, or his writing style. The first thing she noticed was how soft the handwriting was, which meant it wasn’t frantic or rushed. There was a hefty amount of thought put into putting these ideas and words together. After her second read, she noticed a shift in the final few lines. They were rougher and had some shaky strokes. Ametrine had no idea where her observation skills came from, and she definitely had no idea how her mother knew.

“Do you think he went to the forbidden?” The question slipped out, and Queen Violet’s eyes went wide. Solvi looked at her, curious about how she figured that out just simply based on a goodbye letter.

“He would never betray the court like that!” Solvi yelled, snatching the letter from her. The motion made Ametrine jump a little bit. She didn’t really think about how accusatory that sounded, and how that could come across as a serious offense.

“Calm down. I don’t know your brother. It just seems that there’s unfinished business and that he’s apologizing for going somewhere because he knows the potential consequences.” Solvi closed his eyes, taking in air, and calmly tried to grasp onto what she was saying.

“Is this some kind of sick joke? You’re right you don’t know my brother, and you have no right to accuse him of that.”

Ametrine gave up, it was like talking to a wall, and she was over it, so she closed her eyes and had to come up with a new communication strategy, by talking with her mother. The woman who never answers questions, hoping and pleading that she’d be at least a little bit more rational, than he was. Ametrine figured he was probably emotional, and dealing with all of this basically on his own, without knowing his true allies could be overwhelming. Especially for someone who has no clue how to regulate their emotions.

“I wasn’t trying to accuse Elio of anything heinous. I don’t think he’s betraying the treaty or the Court.” Ametrine paused, collecting her thoughts some more, “I think he has information we don’t, and without any knowledge of him I think he’s seeking answers from outside the Court...”

“Which is why he’s going to the forbidden,” the queen cut her off, then looked at Solvi, “Hand me the letter back for a moment.”

He hesitantly did as she asked, dreading it, wanting to hold on to any piece of his brother. He would never admit that, though. She flipped the letter upside down and passed it back to Ametrine, who was confused for a moment, then she saw it. A few numbers, they each represented his voyage; this was an itinerary. The final one was a part of the world she just didn’t recognize. To get to the forbidden, someone would have to go through a passage tunnel, where the Sapphire Kingdom meets the old Onyx Kingdom. Not many mermorphs knew that. Ametrine certainly didn’t, she also had no idea how to really read coordinates or a map, so she thought they’d need someone else.

“There are numbers, and I think it’s a map or itinerary. I don’t really know how to read them, but maybe we can get someone who...” She stopped herself, and handed the letter back to Solvi, realizing that’s why she had them stay back. Queen Violet smiled to herself at that. She liked seeing how her daughter thought.

Before they could finish deciphering any more of the message, a blood-curdling scream echoed through the vault. Solvi quickly put the letter in his pocket. It wasn’t coming from inside, but from the center of the Court, the three of them rushed outside and made their way through the commotion, and nothing could prepare them for what they saw.

In front of them, right in the middle of the court, for so many citizens to see, a Sapphire mermorph was convulsing and coughing up blood, in fact, there was blood coming from every possible source on their face. They looked a pale yellow color and everyone was either screaming, crying, or frozen in horror. Before Ametrine or Solvi could even react to what they were seeing, Queen Violet called for them to be pulled back, along with the other celestium

holders, and all the leader's children, by one of the Aurelian Guard. Taken to the vault, locking them in, and keeping it heavily guarded.

ECC:OO:

Chapter 4:

All natural Chaos in the Court

Olivine's Notebook:

Heir's Level of Irritation

Olivine

Kingdom: Peridot

Annoyance Level: 0 (I'm literally the best)

Aquamarine

Kingdom: Sapphire

Annoyance Level: 6 (I can tolerate; Makes me laugh)

Elio

Kingdom: Gold

Annoyance Level: 7 (Talks too much; Sometimes redeemable)

Taji

Kingdom: Amethyst

Annoyance Level: 9 (Don't like kids)

Ametrine

Kingdom: Amethyst

Annoyance Level: ? (Princess Training)

Olivine sat on the edge of the shore tired. All the festival preparations occupied everyone in the Peridot kingdom, there was a lot of pressure on them to present something new to the court. Olivine's family prided themselves on having little to no waste, ensuring that there was hardly any damage to the ecosystem. They weren't just presenting a new advancement, but some new sustainability tactics. The Peridot Kingdom started making the architecture of their territory made up of shipwrecks and recycled materials. These things started becoming an issue because of how many mermorphs began shifting from the sea to primarily being on land. They rebuilt aspects of their community from scratch, and they believe in using every aspect of every resource so that they don't interfere with the natural balance of the sea.

Olivine is usually obsessed with the festival; it gives them an opportunity to express themselves and immerse themselves in other mermorphs cultures. After presenting her kingdom's ideas they figured no one would care about what they had to say. Her mom, Queen Jade, made sure to make them feel heard, even though she was busy with the twins.

Olivine had dark brown hair that contrasted heavily with their bright green eyes that shone through their sandy beige skin. She was a few inches taller than Ametrine, but her posture didn't show that. Olivine primarily wore their hair in two long braids, and made almost all of her own clothes and accessories. They also carried a notebook, and not many know the content.

After being dismissed from the Vault a second time, Olivine went to make rounds through the main parts of the festival, everything was beautifully arranged, and they couldn't help but think that this type of unity all the time would make the court even stronger. A tap on her shoulder pulled them completely out of the daze, "You had some good ideas earlier." It was Aquamarine, they had a small smirk on their face, and Olivine wanted nothing more than to rip it off.

“Thanks, you too.” She decided against it.

“Keeping it classy.”

“Yeah, just like your dad.” Aquamarine’s smirk immediately vanished.

“At least I have one...” Olivine’s jaw was practically on the floor, but before she could rebuttal, Aquamarine continued,

“Sorry. That was too far. I have two dads, don’t want to forget to mention one of them you know.” Instead of Olivia getting angry like Aquamarine expected, they laughed. Which caused Aquamarine to join in.

“Ok, that was a good one,” Olivine paused, trying not to laugh too loudly, “I’ll get you back for it though.”

They had so many things in common, and yet they only ever saw the differences. During the unity festival, they could put aspects of their respective beliefs aside, and just enjoy a silent understanding that they each share. They knew this festival was nothing more than a showcase of one-upping each kingdom, but at least they didn’t have to do anything but enjoy the week.

“So how do you feel about our newest celestium kid?” Aquamarine asked, looking up at Olivine.

“I think that Queen Violet is always trying to make sure her kingdom’s the center of attention...”

“Yeah, but that’s not Ametrine’s fault...”

“True, still annoying though, wanna get food?”

Aquamarine nodded at both statements, realizing they were also hungry.

Before the pair even reached the edge of the festival where the food was, a loud scream could be heard, they stopped in their tracks, rushing towards the sound of the scream, in the middle of the

court. Both of their eyes widened at the sight. Olivine worried for their siblings, they were barely one, and she was worried about them. However Aquamarine was frozen in shock, not fully registering the scene in front of them, they were quickly moved and escorted to the very heavily guarded vault along with all the other leader's kids, Olivine thought about the others that were out there, silently hoping that Queen Violet would make sure all the mermorphs were safe. It was a lot to take in.

"Isn't this the type of thing your celestium could help with, Olivine," Aquamarine said, no, they pleaded. Their voices crack, clearly on the verge of tears. It was a citizen from their home, they felt responsible. They couldn't even recognize who it was and that scared Aquamarine even more.

Olivine didn't have it in her to break their heart, but everyone old enough to understand knew that whoever that mermorph was, was dead. When Olivine took too long to answer, Aquamarine had to take some time to accept the truth.

"We can't just sit in here, and do nothing! What if more mermorphs die?" This time they were full-on crying.

It was no surprise. Nothing like this has ever happened in the court. None of them in that room knew what to do. Ametrine was sitting with her brothers, and even though Taji hadn't really warmed up to her being there yet. He hugged her, just like Reign was when she first came. For the first time in a long time, Ametrine felt a sense of peace. Even in the small moments of protecting her brother. Olivine saw that the twins were sleeping, and was happy that they were safe. Aquamarine was still trying to mentally unpack what they saw. Bringing an only child they took self-soothing to another level. Solvi stood in the corner closest to the door. The fact that they were all trapped here in the vault clearly made him uncomfortable. He was a bit

claustrophobic, but that was something he'd never admit, so he had to ignore the trapped feeling in his chest, and just try his best to relax, and hide it.

No one in the Vault knew it, but the magic was dying and had in fact been dying for a while. Queen Violet figured it out. She was well aware of the fact that there wasn't a lot of time, but she didn't necessarily know how much or what that meant. The fact that mermorphs were getting sick. Made her scared. After moving every other mermorph to a safe place in the Gold kingdom's palace she got together with the heads of the Court at hers. It actually was a lot easier than she thought. The death was so sudden and extremely random. Even most of the adults sat in shock, not knowing what to say or how to move forward from their current situation. Queen Jade, even with how annoying she could be, had medical expertise for everything in the Court, and beyond. When it was confirmed that everyone else was as safe as they were going to be for now, navigating through the unknown, Queen Jade spoke up to the rest of them.

"I'm not entirely sure what it is?" That response did not reassure a single mermorph in the room.

"It could have something to do with the missing celestium, or something is wrong with the magic..."

"We're vulnerable to sea monsters, again." Queen Violet cut her off, thinking out loud. Normally she is really good at keeping her initial thoughts to herself. Giving herself a chance to curate the best, and most well-received response. Everyone was in shock, so she was off her game.

They decided to check everyone for signs of anything, but first, they had to figure out how it started and since not many mermorphs witnessed it until it was too late the task would be entirely too time-consuming and difficult, so for now they started releasing everyone back into

the festival, and just waited. It definitely wasn't the same energy. Most likely due to so many mermorphs witnessing that horror. They blocked the area off and as much as anyone tried to get back to business as usual it just wasn't possible.

Meanwhile, the kids that were locked in the vault, for their safety, found out that the guards had left, probably a long time ago. They were in such a state of shock they didn't realize or have time to unpack their emotions. The older ones, specifically the celestium holders, and Solvi found a corner away from the younger ones.

"What was that?" Ametrine asked. The other two just looked over at Olivine, which was a Peridot kingdom situation, health and safety is their platform.

"I don't know. It's not anything we have nowadays, and to be honest I haven't really studied diseases. We usually only need to use remedies, and at the most, we can just use the celestium for anything more complex."

"This wouldn't be happening if your brother wasn't missing. He can't just disappear with a celestium, that has never happened before!" Aquamarine had anger seeping through their voice. Trying to find anyone to blame. It wasn't Solvi's fault, and they knew that, but they were not in an emotional position to think clearly.

Solvi didn't like the fact that everyone kept acting like his brother was this horrible mermorph, and that he'd betray the Court in any way. He secretly wanted to punch a wall, but in all honesty, he was tired. Extremely tired, his brother was missing, and now everyone is trying to accuse him of breaking their treaty. He hadn't been able to rest at any point because of it, and he was exhausted.

“Do you think I want my brother to be missing? You think I like sitting here, helpless?”

His voice almost raised above a whisper, but he stopped himself before it could, thinking about the fact that there were babies nearby.

“Well then stop being helpless, and do something about it.” Aquamarine was irritated, and neither one of them was mature enough to truly unpack everything, and set aside their emotional baggage to try and come up with a solution.

“You’re his brother, think about where he’d go.” Aquamarine was not going to let it go. They were so sad, angry, and scared that there wasn’t much else going on in their head. Just a lot of emotions that do not align themselves to form coherent and rational thoughts.

Solvi’s blood was starting to boil and anger was bubbling to the surface, but he did his best to shove it down, “He left a letter...” Aquamarine cut him off,

“What, how long have you known about this we could’ve...”

Ametrine spoke up before anything could get worse, trying to cut even a small bit of the tension. “We just found out about it today...”

“Why did you get to know us, and we didn’t?” Olivine jumped into the conversation. Ametrine rolled her eyes and ignored the question.

“We can use the coordinates on the letter. It shouldn’t take us too long to get through them. If we use tunnels.” Aquamarine and Sovi nodded,

“How do we get out of here? We can’t just leave so our parents will know.” Olivine found a flaw in their plan.

“Well, we can figure that out when we get out of the vault,” Solvi said, blindly following any idea that could potentially lead him to find his brother. Olivine agreed, and they were able to

slip out the vault, without the younger kids knowing. The younger kids did know, but they were too scared to move from their spots. They had no idea what was happening.

Everyone being released back into the festival was a perfect accident that fell onto them. But everyone was separated by territory and were arguing, coming up with theories meaning that they could make an escape. They used the tension to their advantage. No one had noticed that the four of them slipped through a tunnel. Since not many mermorps would be at the Peridot kingdom the first part of their plan was to stop there, and get equipment. Also a boat. The waters could be unpredictable. After that they'd begin to blindly follow coordinates, hoping that Elio would be in one of the places.

The tunnels were easy to navigate, but Solvi had never been through them, He could barely even swim. He wouldn't tell any of them that, though. He just hoped it was too intense, and that the process would be quick. Luckily it was, and he barely felt anything when they arrived at the Peridot Kingdom. Everyone, except Olivine, was in awe of the architecture. They tried to guide them through, knowing that this stop needed to be as brief as possible. The water was fresh, and there were farms almost everywhere. Olivine grabbed a bunch of equipment and other random things she thought they needed. With the majority of mermorphs at the festival, they easily navigated through the Peridot territory.

They just wanted to complete the ritual, and for all of this to be over, but they were barely getting along. Swallowing their pride they prepared for this journey and planned on never speaking to each other again after all of this was done. The Ethereal Court's cracks and flaws were being exposed, and that secretly scared each nation. The reality is that their lives were so deeply intertwined, that if the Court failed there was no going back for any of the Kingdom's.

They had to rely on each other at this moment, and just loosely align their goals to complete the ritual, and hopefully not suffer any more deaths.

“What do you mean they’re gone, Taji?” Queen Violet, put her hand on her forehead, feeling a headache coming on. An extremely brutal and gruesome death happened when one celestium went missing, but now all of them were gone. The queen dreaded the conversation she was inevitably going to have to have with the others. After the leaders were officially cleared to get back to their kids. They immediately noticed the ones missing and were extremely irritated, and scared. None of them let it show, because they had to keep their composure. In order not to cause more chaos in the court.

ECC:OO:

Chapter 5:

Freeze! Am I the drama?

The surrounding land within the Sapphire kingdom is like a tundra. The cold doesn't bother many of The Sapphire Kingdom is a land of icy tundra, where the cold doesn't bother any of the native mermorphs, but it can be challenging for those who choose to move there. Some newcomers have been complaining about the accommodations and are advocating for a more sustainable use of the sea that would integrate mermorphs into the complex ecosystem of the water. Meanwhile, Aquamarine, an only child, is slated to present the Sapphire Kingdom's new invention. Though they don't care much about politics, they are eager to be taken seriously by their parents and will pretend to care if it helps their cause.

Aquamarine had short dark brown hair that was highlighted with a pale blue. Their skin was a honey ivory color. They had deep blue eyes, and were extremely short. They wore thick glasses that double as goggles in the water.. They don't need them under the sea, but it helps for the adjustment of land and sea. Aquamarine also has extremely sharp teeth, something that helps navigating the intense ecosystem. Although they were an only child, they were often overlooked for major opportunities because of how overprotective their parents were.

Arriving at the festival, they are focused on food, and the chaos and commotion are overwhelming. Olivine and Aquamarine, despite their kingdoms' friendly innovation rivalry, stick together because they have a lot in common. However, tensions run high, and they can't stop taking digs at each other. Aquamarine is particularly unimpressed with the time being wasted and the urgency of completing a ritual with a missing piece that has seemingly vanished. The pressure is on because now they have less than seven days to complete it.

When the other two find out about the note left by Ametrine, they are extremely unimpressed and wonder how she could have had access to it without informing them. They ignore their biases and focus on finding Elio, completing the ritual, and returning to some semblance of normalcy. Ametrine feels guilty about leaving the court and hiding a note with her youngest brother, hoping they won't find it for a long time.

Making their way to the Peridot Kingdom border, they realize that they need a boat to cross the forbidden territory. None of them have ever been anywhere they didn't know, and it's a terrifying prospect for all of them. Aquamarines can't hide their feelings, and their faces say it all. The others try to remain stoic and neutral, controlling their facial expressions as they navigate the experience. Ametrine feels guilty and leaves the note with her youngest brother, hoping they won't find it for a long time.

As they arrive at the edge of the Peridot Kingdom border, King Capri laments that all of their kids are missing, and they have no idea where they could be. Aquamarine's sarcasm and attitude are reminiscent of their dads, and everyone points the finger at Queen Violet, who rolls her eyes and tries to avoid the shenanigans of the other kingdoms. Though her memory isn't perfect, she remembers at least some of the details. mermorphs that were born here, but some of the others who decided to move here have been complaining about accommodations. They want to use more of the sea, not in an invasive way, but in a way that intertwines mermorphs inside the waters' already extremely complex ecosystem. Aquamarine was slated to present the Sapphire Kingdom's new invention. Aquamarine couldn't care less, they just wanted to be taken seriously by their parents, and if pretending to care about their political perspective would do that, then so be it. Being an only child this was their only chance to proudly represent their parent's, get them off their back.

They got to the festival and didn't really believe anything they said in the vault. They were focused on food. Olivine and Aquamarine have a lot in common, so they usually stick together, even if their kingdoms have a bit of a friendly innovation rivalry. After all the chaos and commotion it was a lot to take in maneuvering through their new reality.

The four of them made it through the tunnel, everything was awkward and tense. They couldn't stop taking digs at each other.

"The first set of coordinates are to the Peridot kingdom, how could you not realize that," Aquamarine said, really unimpressed at the amount of time being wasted. They had less than seven days to complete a ritual with a missing piece that had just seemingly vanished.

When the other two found out about the note, they were extremely unimpressed. Thinking about how Ametrine had any access to it, it's unfair, how come they couldn't know? There were so many other questions lingering as well. It was extremely unfair to them, and without a way they both just ignored their biases and wanted to focus on finding Elio, doing the ritual, and hopefully, things can go back to some type of normal.

"We had to stop here anyway. It's not a big deal." Ametrine defended him, trying to at the very least cut him some slack. Everyone was stressed and nervous. None of their brains have formed enough.

"How come your Kingdom didn't notice Olivine?" The question seemed innocent, but there was venom in Aquamarine's tone that Olivine was not particularly fond of.

"Excuse me? I don't know who comes through this kingdom every moment in time. That's not my job! You're being irrational. I get that you're mad, but calm down, and use critical thinking skills, please." Aquamarine just nodded, calming down a little bit, as much as they could under the circumstances.

“Also these coordinates are the Turquoise faction, on the border of our territories. I wouldn’t have known, no one in this kingdom would even be aware, they follow Sapphire’s celestium.”

Olivine tried to reassure them, and it seemed to work. Even if it was only for a moment or so.

Ametrine listened to their conversation and thought about how smart Elio was for using fractions to slip past the kingdoms. She thought about how if they did find him, and complete this ritual on time, she’d definitely ask him about disappearing, just because of how interesting the situation was. No one left the court, especially not by choice. Elio was the first case of something like this happening; it made Ametrine feel somewhat bad about how many times she wanted to leave the court. That was before she met her family. Now she was much too curious for answers.

“Why didn’t you live with your family?” Aquamarine asked, getting straight to the point of asking the lingering question.

“Princess training.” She said somewhat sarcastically.

“That’s not a real thing is it?” Solvi cut in. Making Ametrine roll her eyes.

“It’s not she’s kidding.” Olivine laughed a little. Causing them to all start laughing. Even with all their stress they needed moments that were calm in the middle of their storm. They were getting prepared to travel into the unknown.

They finally made it to the edge of the Peridot Kingdom border.

“We have to get a boat, there’s no tunnels through the forbidden, and they also didn’t know what was beneath the surface of the water, it wasn’t something they were used to. None of them had ever been anywhere they didn’t know, this was a territory that was terrifying for all of them, Aquamarine couldn’t hide their feelings about this situation in any way. Their faces said it all. The others were good at being stoic and neutral. They were all good at controlling their facial expressions and navigating through the experience. Ametrine felt guilty and didn’t tell anyone,

but she left a note with her youngest brother, hoping it would be a long enough time before they found it.

“Great, now all of our kids are missing, and you hid a note from us, so we have no idea where they could be, so I guess you could say I’m doing amazing.” King Capri said that Aquamarine got their attitude and sarcasm straight from their dad.

Everyone pointed the finger at Queen Violet, she rolled her eyes not trying to deal with the shenanigans of the other kingdoms. She has a pretty good memory. Although it’s not perfect she remembers at least two of the coordinates. This was more than what they knew.

“There were a few coordinates in the letter. If we split up and have them covered we can stop them before they even make it to the forbidden.” Queen Violet wanted to slap herself for revealing that last part, she had been off her game ever since everything happened. Since it happened so fast, and her mind is constantly focused on other things at the moment.

The others in the room were not impressed. They were angry at the fact that she kept that from them.

“The forbidden! I knew they couldn’t be trusted, especially after that deal with the…” Queen Jade rushed out not really taking into consideration the consequences and exposing her biases. She was quickly cut off,

“Don’t be like that. He’s young and extremely sensitive. He just misses his parents, and probably wants answers, we did. I’m not judging Elio for that, and no one else should either.”

“Maybe that’s because you’re in on it.” Said, King Capri

Queen Violet did not like being accused of that. Not in the slightest. She was good at keeping her composure, and she liked to keep things classy, but it was becoming increasingly more and more clear that there were deeper issues involving the Court.

“Excuse me? You want to reword that, and think about things before you speak.” She was stern, and usually, her intimidation comes from what she can do, but right now it came from what she knew, specifically about the whereabouts of all their children, including her own.

“I just meant that you should have told us about the note.” His tone shifted to a little above a whisper.

“Then next time, let’s think, and say that.”

They stood around the vault trying to figure out where to go first, and how to navigate through the tension. There wasn’t much they could do in that moment, but focus on spinning a narrative. They worked through the options of what could explain something so brutal, but they kept drawing it out and blaming each other.

That’s when Taji burst through the door with a piece of paper in his hand, he ignored the shocked looks on everyone’s face and handed it to his mother. As much as Ametrine irritated him just by existing he didn’t want her to die, or be hurt. Queen Violet looked over the note, and her eyes widened, all their kids were heading to one place there were no stops, no other plans to navigate. They were headed to the forbidden and planned on trying to save Elio themselves. Ametrine expressed that she did the math and they should be back in time for the ritual.

Having all their celstiums gone, and their main line of defense completely out of sight made everyone in the room extremely nervous. They had no idea what they were going to do. They had to go get their kids, but handling this Ethereal Court situation was a priority. Even if every parent in the room wanted to jump in the water and head straight to their kids, they couldn’t because they held a responsibility in their hands. There was no possible way they could just abandon their posts without implementing a plan. It would be horrible to do that now, especially after all the commotion. Everyone in the room knew they had to parent to be united

and remain a front to the entire court. If not it could mean even more chaos. None of them really knew what was going to happen to their kids, but it was a risk they had to take for the greater good of the Ethereal Court. Queen Violet dismissed her son from the vault and then started pacing again. She hated her kids seeing her panicking, but she wasn't the only one. Queen Jade looked like she was going to explode with anger and frustration. Queen Violet was good at hiding how she felt about a situation, but right now she was truly scared she just got her daughter back home and she's gone. She started to feel guilty about all her decisions made up until now,

“This has to be Ametrine's idea, she's corrupted our children! And made them think that this reckless decision and behavior is ok.” King Capri said, just extremely irrational and frustrated.

Queen Violet knew that, one of his citizens passed, and now his child was on a one-way mission. She tried her hardest not to react too much, but no one was going to insult her daughter. Especially not while she was present and in the room.

“My daughter did not corrupt anyone's child. Now I know we're all frustrated, but again think before you speak. Next time I'm not going to be as nice.”

“I'm sorry.” He apologized, not saying anything else.

“We can't all go and get them but one of us could go, and the others could handle the festival situation. We also need Simeon to figure out the ritual preparation because normally the celestium holders would do it, but if they come back the day of or something we won't have time for them to prepare.” Finally adding something of substance to the conversation, Queen Violet thought about Ling Capri's suggestions. They seemed innocent enough, but there was no way any one of them in that room would stay behind and hope their child would be ok.

They also knew that it would take a couple of days to navigate that trip. None of them said anything for a while. Focusing on the pros and cons of their situation.

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ECC: OO**Chapter 6: Partial****Fresh pages:*****Nautical Nonsense***

They all made their way on the boat and prepared to navigate through a tough journey accepting the trials ahead, they all hoped Elio was ok. Ametrine believed that the commotion on the court could have something to do with Elio missing, and she truly hoped he was ok, but she was worried about it all especially because none of them had ever seen anything like the death they witnessed. It was something that would stick with them and the entire court until they died. That image would never erase itself from their memories, and they all were still having a hard time accepting it.

They got on the boat and prepared for their journey into the unknown. Ametrine felt less guilty about the note because now they were in the thick of it. The boat moved through the waves, and they all were forced to look ahead and hope they were navigating the situation the best, and that Elio would be brought home safely. They weren't too long into their journey when they heard thunder, realizing a storm was brewing. Olivine hadn't ever navigated a boat through a major storm so she hoped it wouldn't be too much.

The court still had very high tensions, but they tried to use the festival to celebrate the life of the fallen, and that got some of the mermorphs, who weren't direct witnesses and bystanders on board. They also created a space to safely air out any emotions and trauma. The leaders were hoping that this would be enough to temporarily handle the situation, as long as it didn't happen

again. Then it started to rain. It's not uncommon and they always plan for it, so they quickly moved everything inside without thinking too much of it. Queen Violet felt off about the circumstances surrounding the rain, she felt like it was a sign, and she did not like that so she swallowed her feelings down, and attempted to make sure she put on a brave face and navigated through the chaos, believing that everyone would be safe, and that maybe she was just reacting emotionally because so much happened today.

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They had no idea what they were going to do. They had to go get their kids, but handling this Ethereal Court situation was the priority. Even if every parent in the room wanted to jump in the water and head straight to their kids, they couldn't because they held a responsibility in their hands. There was no possible way they could just abandon their posts without implementing a plan. It would be horrible to do that now, especially after all the commotion. Everyone in the room knew they had to pretend to be united and remain a front to the entire court. If not it could mean even more chaos. None of them really knew what was going to happen to their kids, but it was a risk they had to take for the greater good of the Ethereal Court. Queen Violet dismissed her son from the vault and then started pacing again. She hated her kids seeing her panicking, but

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Ametrine had never been on a boat. She never needed to go on one, even though she knew this was a rescue mission. There was a small part of her that was excited about being able

to have this experience. She didn't let it show because she wanted everyone to see how seriously she was taking their mission. She thought about why Queen Violet wouldn't have a team search for Elio, and she realized that it was because it was a betrayal to the court. She also wondered what would happen after they got back to the festival. She just hoped everything would be ok, and that they would be able to get the ritual done, and her mother would finally give some answers about something, anything.

Aquamarine had only been on a boat a couple of times and didn't really enjoy it at all. They got sick immediately and had to avoid doing anything that made them think about the boat, and they hated jumping into warmer waters. They didn't say anything in case it would cause a problem within their rescue plans, they were willing to accept their sickness if it meant they could get back and do the ritual faster. Then they could go home and put all the craziness behind them.

Olivine had been on plenty of boats. She knew everything there was to know about navigating through the waters, proper navigation, and maintenance. They knew how to make sure everything was on course and that they were taking the fastest route possible to get through the forbidden. Olivine was extremely nervous and felt a little anxious about the amount of pressure they placed on themselves. She realized that she was the only one who could do this particular part of their journey, so they used that to their advantage. They were one of the most powerful assets on the mission, so they definitely would have pulled when it came to that.

Solvi had been on a couple of boats, but he hated it. He just enjoyed being on land, anytime he interacted with the water there was never anything that kept his interest. He was more interested in the culture on land, and he had a hard time seeing underwater, so he couldn't really appreciate the beauty of it all.

They all were slowly beginning to open up to each other, realizing that they all were in this together.

“How long until you guys think our parent’s come looking for us?” Aquamarine asked, breaking some more of the tension.

“Not anytime soon.” Olivine chimed in.

Ametrine thought for a moment, enjoying the lightness of their current conversation, especially amidst all the chaos.

“Yeah, we should be fine.”

“No one’s going to be looking for me.” Solvi said, but it was quiet, barely above a whisper, and to himself. He quickly changed the subject, not wanting any more attention, “He stopped at a few places, maybe we should stop at some, and see if any of these factions know anything.”

“That’s a good idea, we also need a plan if he’s somehow made it.”

Elio did make it, and in all honesty he was regretting the decision. He hadn’t been caught or anything yet, and he’s only currently on their soil out of pure curiosity. His parent’s death and disappearance was always something shut down when talked about in the court. In fact no one talked about the first ritual, or even the secret second one. That Elio only found out about through researching things at the Vault, unless it specifically had something to do with the Unity Festival. He found a cave right outside of their territory, and planned to rest there until he figured out his next steps, but for now he was just enjoying the blanket of safety he had.

The four of them decided they should probably get to know each other, now that they had some down time, but none of them truly knew where to start. They all had issues with making friends. Aquamarine was awkward, and usually didn’t let words bypass their brain. Solvi makes himself unapproachable, and doesn’t enjoy small talk enough to even pretend to be listening.

Olivine is judgemental, and unintentionally places arbitrary expectations on everyone she encounters. Ametrine doesn't trust anyone, and puts on a performance most of the time.

Aquamarine started the conversation, feeling the most secure about themselves. They talked a little about being an only child. How all the attention is on them, and how their parent's put all their expectations on them, and also what it's like in the Sapphire territory.

"My dad's don't care about what I do, as long as I do something." They paused, thinking about what else to say, but they were realizing slowly how little they actually knew about who they are. Just how they fit into the puzzle of everything around them.

Olivine went next, and talked about the pressure placed on her, and how being in the Peridot kingdom is not easy. It's the one territory that has extreme seasonal shifts, and sometimes they come with little to no warning. They talked about how the only way to get her mom's attention is by doing something bigger than those babies. "My mother is obsessed with the twin's, which is fine I guess..." Olivine stopped, before saying something she'd definitely regret in the future.

Ametrine and Solvi didn't really want to talk about their pasts. "It's not bittersweet, or something that came out beautifully in the end. Everything and everyone sucks, and has way too many secrets for me." Ametrine forced herself to go next. She didn't go into much detail, but figured the group was satisfied because no one made her feel the need to continue.

Solvi just sat there in the silence for a while, he wasn't planning on talking, but felt like that was messed up, especially since everyone opened up. He quickly rushed through, and said the basics about himself. Not drawing much attention to many details, and just trying to fill the social interaction quota. "No one wants to hear anything about me. I don't go on adventures and talk to everyone."

They all had a silent understanding of at the very least having each other's backs for the time being. Knowing something about each other was something they realized would help them in the long run, and develop into the bigger picture. The water wasn't too chaotic for the time being, so they just sat in the energy. All feeling even a little bit safer.

Updated Glossary:

Important Definitions & Key Concepts:

- Celestiums: Artifacts from each Kingdom, that is the main source of their magic.
Given to them by their ancestors. After their arrangement with the sea monsters.
- Ethereal Court: The name of the main kingdoms/the kingdoms apart of the treaty, Amethyst, Peridot, Gold, and Sapphire as one unit at peace.
- Turning: The ability to grow a tail in specific types of water.
- Fresh Waters: Anyone who's turning abilities only survive and thrive in freshwater. The entirety of the Peridot Kingdom falls into this category, but it is not limited to them.
- Salt Waters: Anyone whose abilities only survive and thrive in salt water. This is almost everyone else. Most common type of turning.
- Ice Dwellers: The entire Aquamarine Kingdom can only turn in their territory because the water has to be cold enough to sustain their abilities.
- Land Dwellers: Don't grow tails, they sacrificed this ability for more land control.
- Transport tunnels: The way each kingdom/territory/land/nation travels.
- Aurelian Guard: This is what the members of the Gold Kingdom's army are called.
- The Forbidden: A passageway that leads to the Ruby Kingdom.
- Mermorphic/Mermorph: An aquatic shifter (universal term for every creature that can be in both land and sea)

- hydorecessive: when a mermorph hasn't been submerged in water for an extended period of time, causing them to have an imbalance in their energy, weakening them and any abilities they possess.
- The Vault: An exclusive library that only authorized individuals have access to.
- Factions: Sub-Kingdoms, like cities that formed due to the Ethereal Court intermixing. They do not have their own Celestiums so they are tied to whichever nation is closest.

Some Important world building:

- The magic is only half as powerful as it used to be. (The reason why the kingdoms/territories use land primarily and use of any underwater abilities are heavily restricted) Also the past ten years Mermorphs have been going missing in certain parts of the sea
- The water is used for food and transport. Other uses are special occasions or emergencies.
- All kingdoms had small land areas but now some of them have been forced to move closer together in order to avoid being attacked in the oceans.
- The Amethyst Kingdom is one of the most powerful of the kingdoms, they are responsible for information access. They formulate all narratives, and write history. Everything everyone knows is regulated by the Amethyst Kingdom.

- The Gold kingdom is also extremely powerful; they're the only kingdom with exclusive land rights and access. They also have a huge army. And a lot of weapons and equipment.
- The Peridot Kingdom has power because they are all fresh waters. And they're responsible for food production, and a lot of them work on farms and fish.
- Sapphire kingdom is the coldest place. They're in icy waters, and responsible for transportation and trading. They're also the furthest of the Ethereal Court
- The Ruby Kingdom is completely isolated, their borders are heavily armed and monitored. No one is allowed in or out. They're harboring a huge secret.
- The Onyx Kingdom also known as the lost kingdom was a casualty during the ritual. They don't have many ties to their homeland or history but the few that are left are protective of each other.