

When Love Lasts Chapter 12

Chapter 12

At the sight of this, Alaric took out the first-aid kit from underneath the counter and handed it to Heather, saying, "There are more snakes now in the mountains, so be careful where you tread." "Got it. I'll be leaving now," Heather declared happily as she took the first-aid kit from her father and put it into her basket, then headed out the backdoor where there was a pathway through the farmland and crossed into the mountains. She had been going into the mountains to forage for herbs and mushrooms and the like for Lilly these past few days. She would go from hill to hill, and with each one, she was required to travel deeper into the woods. The hustle and bustle of the city were notably absent in the mountains, but what replaced it was the ethereal quiet of nature. As Heather crouched underneath a large tree and prodded around the shrubbery, she picked out certain herbs while listening to the low thrumming sounds of the insects and the lively chirping of the birds, though all these woodland creatures decidedly stayed hidden. She thought she was rather lucky today to have come across plenty of mushrooms and a few rare herbs or two. She didn't notice that she had already wandered deep into the hills, and here, the trees were so tall they looked like they could brush the sky, and there was even a little stream that flowed slowly down the crest of the hill. It was just the beginning of summer, but under the foliage of the woods, it felt like warm springtime here. Heather had only just found a couple of summer berries when she looked up and inadvertently saw flowers of a deep purple shade hidden among the shrubbery. From afar, they looked gorgeous, and they reminded her of pansies. It was only natural for girls to be drawn toward pretty wildflowers, and Heather was no exception. She hurried over to the shrubbery so that she could pick out a few of those pretty pansies and plant them back home. However, when she truly came up close to the flowers, she faltered. All the color drained from her face as she stared at what she had initially thought were pansies. These were not harmless wildflowers but opium poppies instead! These flowers had to be an invasive species, for they were not likely indigenous to these parts. More importantly, she couldn't understand why there were opium poppies here in the mountains. She frowned and thought about it for a long moment, then decidedly pulled up a few of these poppies, then shoved them into her basket and covered them up with the rest of what she had foraged. After that, she made her way through the winding mountainous terrain and moved on to the summit, where she stood on a large rock as she gazed out into the distance. From here, she could truly appreciate the green domes of the mountains and the clouds that drifted through the sky. For a moment, it was as if she had been transported to some beautiful, mythical realm. Just then, her gaze moved downward, and that was when she saw that there were large patches of red, pink, orange, yellow, and purple flower fields that dotted the foot of the mountain. It was clear to see that none of these were wildflowers, and Heather realized, to her horror, that those were all opium poppies! She wondered who in the world would think about planting opium poppies in the middle of these remote woods. Suddenly realizing something, she quickly turned to run. Making her way downhill took less time than it did for her to make her way uphill, but she had only just reached the midsection of the hill when she heard a loud cry of pain coming from some other direction than the one she was heading in. It was a man's cry. Frowning, Heather quickly hid behind shrubbery and waited to see what was going on. She heard a slapping sound, followed by a scratch and a crack. "Is the snake dead?" "I don't know! Get on my back. I'll take you down the mountain, and we'll find you a doctor." Heather found the voice inexplicably familiar when she heard it. "Oh, no... I can't move at all. My leg's gone numb, and it hurts!" There was another man with him, apparently, for this was a different speaking voice altogether. A dark look flashed in Heather's eyes as she followed the sound of the men's voices. She came upon two men who were dressed in Burlean clothes as they huddled under a large tree not ten feet away. When she saw that one of the men had two puncture marks on his leg with blood oozing out of them and a small copperhead snake lying unmoving next to him, she quickly set her basket down and checked his wound. "Copperhead snakes don't usually bite unless provoked, so you must have accidentally stepped on it just now," Heather said as she pulled out the first-aid kit from her basket and produced a small wooden container. She opened it to reveal the small brown pills scattered inside. Without another word, she took one of the pills and shoved it into the injured man's mouth, then ordered him to swallow it. Then, she took out a syringe and a vial of antivenom, and when all was ready, she gave the man an injection. The two men exchanged a cursory glance after looking at Heather, but they did not object to her ministrations, knowing full well that she was saving a life. Following this, she took out a bottle of water from the basket and twisted open the cap, then gave the man's wound a quick rinse. Having done so, she took out a piece of gauze and placed it over the snake bite, then secured it with surgical tape in a flourish. "Once you get down the mountain, make sure to go into the business district and get a doctor to tend to your wound," Heather said. That was when she looked up and inadvertently met eyes with the other man. The man's eyes were obsidian, and his face was delicately chiseled. While the lower half of his face was covered with a beard, one could tell from his flawless skin that he was a man who was in his twenties. These two men were wearing disguises to hide their true faces, and while they were wearing farmer's clothes, she could tell from the way they spoke that they were not from around these parts. "Thank you for saving my friend," the man said on behalf of his snake-bitten companion. Heather found his voice extremely familiar now that she was hearing it up close, and as a sudden realization dawned upon her, she reached out and ripped the fake beard off the lower half of his face. "It is you! Again!" she cried incredulously. She was still holding onto the fake beard as she gaped at Austin. This man is intent on following me wherever I go like a second shadow! Austin pursed his lips into a shy smile as he greeted, "Hey, Baby. Guess we ran into each other again, huh?" "Wait, do you guys know each other?" Frederick, the one who had been bitten by the snake, demanded in shock as his bewildered gaze flickered over from Austin to Heather. Austin quickly nudged Frederick on the shoulder and said solemnly, "This is my girl. She's kind of like your sister-in-law if you think about it." "Oh, yes! Thank you for saving his life!" Frederick said with an earnest nod. Heather frowned. She decided that she didn't want to waste her breath on these two, so she picked up a branch and poked at the unmoving copperhead snake next to them. "Is it dead?" she mumbled to herself. She was just thinking about moving the snake away from the path when the reptile suddenly coiled and moved. When Frederick saw the creature wriggling again, he let out a panicked cry and shrunk into Austin's arms. He even reached around Austin's neck with his own arms as if to cling to him. It seemed as if the snake bite had really left him traumatized!