

The Alpha God's Luna by Marissa Gilbert Chapter 27

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"Is this a joke?" Astrea's brows went up.

"No." The Rogue King shook his head, not offering her any explanation.

"Fenrir, come on!" She jabbed him gently with her elbow. "You dropped a bomb on me, and now you are leaving me hanging? I don't think so!"

"Ask whatever you want to know," The King suggested as if he really didn't mind.

She wanted to know a lot. Starting from his story with her Teacher to the specifics of what his bracelet was holding, but that was probably off the table. So, she stuck to the subject at hand instead.

"What do you mean Solace's protection prevents people from finding mates?"

"Exactly that. When we were building Solace, I had only one condition. No mates will be found on this land." He stated nonchalantly, and Astrea's lips parted in shock. "That's why they are up in the air now. One day per month, on the morning after the New Moon, is the day when they can feel the bond if they are up there."

"How is that even possible?" She tried to see the couples in the wicker baskets, but they were too far away.

"Magic, of course," Fenrir said, and his f*ingers drifted over the beads of his bracelet.

That has to be a due, Nova whispered, and Astrea had to agree. Were those beads holding magic inside? That would explain why Joran wanted the bracelet.

"No offence, it's romantic and all that, but what happens when they go down?" Astrea was still processing the information.

"Nothing," he shrugged. "They just know now."

“Will they still feel the bond?”

“No.” Again, his tone suggested that it wasn’t a big deal and that didn’t sit right with the Dragonfly.

“But why can’t they feel it again?” She tried to understand if she missed some crucial piece of information. Who wouldn’t want to feel their mate?

“Why would they need to feel it?” He offered her a questioning glance. “I don’t even understand why they want to know in the first place. If they love each other, that should be enough.”

“But we are talking about mates!” Astrea inhaled sharply, trying to hold back her fiery temper. “Who wouldn’t want to know?”

“Anyone with common sense.” Fenrir’s laugh rumbled through his chest.

“And that was your idea? What on earth do you have against mates?” she gasped and noticed a momentary flicker of pain in the man’s eyes, wondering if she had overstepped.

“Everything.” He cut her off as if it wasn’t a big deal. “What’s so special about mates?”

“Everything!” She repeated his word to prove her point. “The mate bond is a divine connection that transcends time and space, forging an unbreakable link between two souls. Everyone strives to find it. It’s an honour to feel it at least once in your lifetime. Nothing else can compare to it.”

Astrea could see his spirits dampening at first, but then something else appeared in his gaze. An unyielding flame she recognised from somewhere.

“Nothing can compare to it? How about love? Real love!” His voice became darker, and she didn’t know if he was angry or simply passionate about the topic.

“The mate bond IS love!” she insisted, but a growl escaped his chest in response.

“Is it, though? So, you’re telling me that two people need the Moon Goddess to tell them they are in love? How is that real love? If they need her to tell them, then they aren’t in love at all!”

“I mean... she sees the souls perfect for each other and binds them.” Astrea had never heard of such an argument against mate bonds, although she had to admit that he had a point.

“Are we just assuming she knows everything about everyone to make such decisions? The last time I checked, she was the Goddess of the Moon, not of people’s destinies. Do you know how many couples she got wrong?”

It seemed as if he’d had this conversation before.

“A few.” Astrea couldn’t deny this. She knew it, too. Everyone did. The Moon Goddess indeed made mistakes from time to time. Queen Savannah of the North had a terrible first mate. Astrea had to work with him for a while, and even she could tell the two were wrong for each other. Then why would the Goddess do it? A part of her believed that their pairing was part of a bigger plan. But... what if it wasn’t?

“But that doesn’t mean the whole mate system is bad,” she pointed out. More often, the bond did work as intended, and it was beautiful to watch.

“Doesn’t it?” He glared at her as if she insulted him. “Imagine spending your whole life bound to a man who is not the one for you.”

“This is why mates can reject each other!” she argued, not knowing why she was bothering. It’s not like she had a mate. But like any girl, she did sometimes imagine what it would be like if there was someone out there for her. She usually quickly erased those thoughts from her mind because, due to her line of work, she didn’t consider herself worthy of such a gift.

“What’s the point of this cosmic connection if they can break it any moment?” Fenrir clearly had been thinking about all this before, which almost made her giggle, but she suppressed the urge.

“They say it enhances the... experience!” she winked at him, watching how a little wrinkle deepened between his brows.

Taken aback at first, Fenrir’s lips soon curled into a menacing smirk.

“Menace, if you are with the right man, there is no need to enhance the experience. You’d be barely managing it anyway.”

“Oh, please-” She rolled her eyes, but before she could retort further, Fenrir’s hands snaked around her waist and pulled her against him roughly, their lips crashing against each other in a k*iss she didn’t expect. The best kind. Her dreams surfaced in her mind, making her forget the clever and snarky response she came up with as she returned his passion. Her body was shaking with desire for this man; his firm dominance did things to her that she’d never admit to out loud. The feverish k*iss left her wanting more, and she almost winced when the rogue finally broke it and made her look at him, holding her face in his rough hands gently.

“Listen to me, Astrea,” he said, his eyes filled with fire and determination. “From the moment I saw you for the first time, I knew you were the one for me. Maybe I didn’t know how to express it or what to do with you, but I sure as hell didn’t need some goddess telling me if this was right or not. I knew it, and deep inside, you know it too.”

Her heart skipped a beat, a familiar pain rising inside her chest.

“N-no, I don’t,” she muttered, but that only deepened his smirk.

“Then why won’t you leave?” He arched his brow, and she didn’t find how to respond. It was rare for her to be lost for words when she needed them, yet with Fenrir, it happened more often than she liked.

Of course, she couldn’t tell him that she couldn’t leave empty-handed. She couldn’t tell him he was her mark, and she didn’t have any relevant information for Joran yet.

And these were the only reasons why she was still here. Nothing else. He was her target. Her target, her target, her target, her target. Maybe if she repeated it enough times, she would believe in it.

“Anyway, it’s time to go.” Fenrir stood up and offered her a hand. “We’ll get breakfast in the city today. There is something else you need to see.”

“Oh, really? What is it?” She smiled, happy to finally get off that awkward subject that made her breathing ragged. This mission would be the end of her.

“You’ll see.” He chose to remain mysterious. “We need to get out of here fast.”

“Why?” Astrea blinked. The dawn was beautiful, and the hot air balloons peacefully soared in the skies, creating a picture of perfection.

“Because some of those couples up there will come down soon, and those breakups will be ugly,” he scoffed. “The idea of mates is so deep in shifters’ heads that they are going to ruin the good relationships they already have for the illusion that one day they would find someone more perfect for them.”

“You really hate the mating system,” she giggled, not realising how easily and naturally their f*ingers laced together as they walked.

“I do,” he confessed with ease. “I already told you I don’t need a mate bond to know what woman I want by my side.”

“Well, maybe you want me because I am your mate.” She let out a little laugh, teasing him and felt her cheeks heat. What was that nonsense?

“You are not,” Fenrir replied as he kept walking, and it felt like a lightning bolt hit her. Why was he dismissing that idea so quickly? Almost as if it was impossible.

She slipped her hand out of his grip immediately.

“You already had a mate,” she whispered, and he stopped.

“I did.” He sighed almost painfully without looking at her. “It didn’t end well.”

This made her mood sour, but to her own surprise, she didn’t remain silent when they returned to the car.

“Is she dead?” Her voice quivered, and she hated that she was demonstrating her weakness.

“They are dead, yes.” Fenrir was clearly regretting sharing this information with her, but she couldn’t stop. For some reason, it was painful. More painful than it was supposed to be with a target.

“They?” she breathed out. “As in more than one? You had several mates?”

“Yes.” He looked like he was concentrating on driving, but she noticed how his hand muscles flexed while he grasped the steering wheel.

“Did you... love them?” This was a stupid question. Of course, he loved his mates. Everybody loved their mates.

“No.” His response startled her. As always, he wasn’t giving her any details. She wanted to smack the back of his head for that.

“Have you... loved anyone in your life?” She heard herself asking. Just when did she become such an emotional mess? It wasn’t like her at all.

“I will answer that question when you make your decision,” Fenrir avoided looking at her, and she was glad. Because even though she knew very well that the right decision for her mission would be to tell him what she thought he wanted to hear, she couldn’t bring herself to lie and say she was going to stay here with him.

That treacherous thought of what her life here would be if she could stay revisited her, and she tried to mentally strangle it and shove it deep, deep down her mind where no one would ever find it.

The breakfast turned out to be two flatbreads filled with eggs, cheese and vegetables, brought from a line of colorful little kiosks in the central square. Astrea didn’t mind, especially since it tasted delicious, and they could keep walking around the city together.

After spending most of her conscious life on an island with the same people around her, Astrea loved it here. Not to mention that Fenrir was always good company. Even though she’d rather die than admit it out loud.

She couldn’t help but notice that today was especially busy, though. Energetic bustle filled the space as if the city anticipated something.

“Fenrir! You’re here at last!” Salome moved her hand, surrounded by a crowd of warriors. Astrea’s recognised some of them, and her body stiffened. There was something she didn’t like about the witch. Salome always tried to demonstrate to her that she was only temporary here in Solace and in Fenrir’s life. The worst thing about it was that she was never openly aggressive, but her words and actions always had a hidden meaning. And to top it off – most people were buying the act. Here in Solace, Salome was practically a saint.

The witch made her way to them and almost instantly draped her arm around Fenrir’s, which made Astrea curse inwardly.

"I am sure Astrea will find her way back to the house; we have work to do today, remember?" She glanced at the king through her thick lashes, which would have been perfect for a mascara ad. The Dragonfly loathed that fact.

"Hey, Sal," she said just to annoy the witch, "I just got here and have no plans of going back, but thank you for being so considerate." Considerate my a*ss, Nova growled.

"Astrea," Salome acknowledged her but quickly returned to what she was really interested in. "Fenrir, Bash can entertain her today. We are about to start."

The Dragonfly tensed. Was Salome trying to get rid of her?

"I brought Astrea here so that she could see everything and draw her own conclusions later," Fenrir retorted as Astrea continued to eat the rest of her delicious wrap to keep her mouth busy because quite a few swear words threatened to spill from her tongue right now.

"How- wonderful." The witch frowned. "So, you were serious about the no secrets part? Is it wise, though?"

She fluttered those lashes again, but to Astrea's satisfaction, it had zero effect on the Rogue King.

"If you don't like it, you don't have to participate this month," he said to the woman, and her red lips pressed tightly into a thin line.

"No, that's fine." Salome shook her head. "How can I be missing when I am one of the Founders?"

Astrea rolled her eyes. The founder word, or the f-card as she called it in her mind, was thrown out by the witch a lot.

"I've never asked, but what exactly does that mean?" She decided that it was as good a time as any to finally find that part out. "So, you founded this city together? What about Raja?"

"I've founded nothing," Fenrir grunted, and Salome sighed.

"Then why-" Astrea could tell that the subject was annoying to him, and this was exactly why she wanted to poke it again.

“Of course, you did!” The witch smiled at him. “Don’t be shy, Fenrir. All these people are here because of you!”

“Yeah, Fenrir, don’t be shy!” Astrea nudged him with her elbow as he gave her a menacing gaze, which she enjoyed to her heart’s content.

“I am not the best storyteller out there,” he said, nodding at Devoss, who stood next to the crowd and waved for him to join them. “Will you excuse me? Astrea, I will be back in a minute or so, and then we can start.”

“Sure, coward,” she whispered into his ear as she stood on her tiptoes, eliciting a low growl from him. Another thing she enjoyed doing. “Don’t think that I will forget about this topic.”

“Fenrir!” Devoss shouted, waving vigorously at his king. “Just a second, please.”

“Excuse me,” Fenrir left, leaving the two women alone.

“So, no Solace foundation story then!” Astrea chuckled, smirking at the witch. “Unless you are willing to fill the gap, of course.” She winked at the woman, knowing that the mighty founder never spared her even a minute of her time to show her how insignificant she was.

“I’m sorry,” Salome shrugged. “It’s a very busy day for the Founders. I need to be over there with my people.”

“Isn’t your tribe your people?” Astrea pointed out, arching a brow.

“They are,” the witch wasn’t even looking at her anymore, “but the people of Solace are my family now.”

I regret you asked her, Nova imitated a gagging sound. That makes two of us, Astrea scoffed.

“But if you want to find out about the founding of Solace, hurry in there!” Salome sneered, and the Dragonfly didn’t like that expression on her pretty face as she pointed behind her. “Old Magda is about to start her retelling. She was one of the first we took in and knows everything about us.”

Astrea's gaze followed a crowd of children on the square near what looked like a mini stage. An old woman was arranging something behind the curtains, and very soon, Astrea realised that she was about to start a puppet show.

That's a first for us, Nova snorted. Let's watch.

Astrea bought herself a cup of coffee from a nearby kiosk and stood at the back, leaning against an arch and watched the kids getting quiet. The old woman put a hat next to her improvised platform, and a few people immediately threw a few coins and banknotes inside.

A navy-blue fabric with silver stars was used as a backdrop, and Astrea found it pretty.

Pleasant Eastern music started playing from an old stereo on the ground as the old woman expertly manipulated the strings of the puppet show, bringing her two first characters to life, a lycan doll and a woman in a red dress.

It's quite possible that we are going to hate this show, Nova pointed out.

No sh*t! Astrea inhaled through her nostrils but still decided to stay. Any information could be useful.

"Welcome, dear guests!" She said in a surprisingly resounding voice, grabbing the attention of everyone around. "It is the time of the month when we remember how this city was built. The place where even the loneliest of rejected souls can find peace and happiness. It all started when a special wolf and the kindest witch fell in love!"

"Say what?" Astrea spit her coffee back into the cup.