

## Chapter 69 - The Alpha God's Luna

Astrea couldn't take her eyes off the woman before her, paralysed by all the memories coursing through her mind.

Her mother, the Moon Goddess, was still alive and well. And she was here in New Asgard, dressed in the finest silk and shiniest diamonds. The contemporary silvery-white attire, adorned with her usual celestial embellishments to highlight her divine status, hinted that Selene was not facing any hardships. She was here as a guest of honour just like the last time, and this realisation made Astrea's stomach twist.

"Ah, Mother-in-law," Vidar sneered, slightly annoyed with her arrival yet respectful enough to let it slide. "We didn't expect you today. I was educating Astraea on the changes done since her last time here."

His eyes slowly found his mate on the ground; her elegant white dress ripped in a few places from the fall, the delicate sheer fabric covered in dirt. It did not escape his gaze that she had a handful of ashes ready to be thrown at him, which annoyed him even more.

Why was this woman so stubborn? As if dirt on his face would make a difference.

She had lost. She had to deal with this by now.

"Vidar, my boy!" A nervous smile graced Selene's lips. "I believe it's my duty to educate my daughter today. Something I failed to do properly in the past."

"Glad we agree on this one," Vidar jerked his chin.

She didn't even look at her daughter, which caused a sense of betrayal and disappointment to settle in Astrea's chest. Had her mother been watching her misery all those years and did nothing?

Vidar dissipated his sword in flames. He looked so smug that it made her sick.

"My love," he said coldly, offering his hand to Astrea. She ensured to give him the one with no bead bracelets on and did not regret it when he roughly pulled her up and into his chest, moving her palm to his lips for a kiss. However, he changed his mind, as her skin was still covered in soot, which let a wave of relief wash over her. She wanted as little physical contact with that man as possible.

“Children,” Selene smiled at the couple as if she hadn’t just witnessed them trying to murder each other, “I thought you spent the last centuries maturing, but you both are still too temperamental for your own good.”

“I’m afraid there’s still so much we need to teach Astraea.” Vidar flexed his jaw.

“Well, tonight is definitely my turn. The wedding is tomorrow, and you still have many things to deal with.” The Moon Goddess radiated artificial sweetness, and Astrea couldn’t take it anymore.

Nothing had changed. Her own mother watched her being tortured for centuries, and it never occurred to her to interfere.

“I am afraid I don’t want to part with my betrothed, even if for a second,” Vidar sneered, locking his arms tighter around her waist. “I missed her too much.”

“But Astraea—” Selene was about to say something when the Dragonfly lost her temper.

“It’s Astrea now. Your daughter Astraea died a long time ago, thanks to you and your choices.” Their gazes met briefly before the Moon Goddess cast her eyes to the ground. “That’s fine. I have nothing to say to this woman. I want to return to my room if that’s all right.”

Vidar’s gaze lingered on her momentarily until a cruel smirk curled onto his lips.

“Now, my love, one conversation with your last remaining parent will not hurt.” He gestured for Selene to come closer, enjoying that he had found yet another way to make his bride miserable.

“I really—” Astrea wanted to protest, but Vidar interrupted her.

“Your mother will be leaving us right after the wedding. She is a very busy woman and wants to give us space to—explore each other the way we should have done years ago. So, one last conversation on the way to your room wouldn’t hurt. The guards will be with you at all times.”

Four Asgardians stepped out of the shadows and bowed respectfully. At least two of them emitted divine auras, which was terrible news. The Dragonfly was a skilled warrior but still no match to them as a mortal.

Vidar took her wrist, ready to kiss it again, but just like last time, he remembered it wasn’t clean and distanced himself to her relief.

“Your wedding dress is probably already waiting for you in your suite,” he added. “I can’t wait to see you wearing it at Valhalla tomorrow.”

Burn the dress, Nova scoffed. Noted!

Astrea wanted to say it out loud, but Selene draped her arm around hers and urged her away.

“Thank you for your understanding, Vidar!”

When Astrea glanced over her shoulder to see what her mate was doing, she saw Vidar storming away and the four guards following them closely.

“Let’s go.” Selene pulled her gently toward the exit, her tone lacking the previous sweetness. “I don’t know what he was thinking about bringing you here!”

“The usual,” she stated bluntly through clenched teeth. “You know, my wonderful mate and his desire to torture me for not loving him.”

The Moon Goddess pursed her lips tightly and then let out a small sigh.

“It wasn’t supposed to be like that,” she said, her voice barely a whisper.

“It doesn’t matter how it was supposed to be,” Astrea seethed. “This is how it is now. This is how it’s been for centuries. And I only have you, my mother, to thank for it!”

“Child,” the Moon Goddess lowered her voice, “I know I made a mistake—”

“Mistake?” her daughter hissed, knowing the guards were too close to speak out loud. “A mistake would be a wedding dress in the wrong size! With your cursed mate bond, you bound me forever to the wrong man!”

Selene looked like she slapped her, but the Dragonfly did not feel sorry.

“Back then, I only wanted to protect you so that you wouldn’t have faced the destiny of your siblings—”

“And the one you assigned to protect me killed me dozens, if not hundreds of times!” Astrea countered.

“I chose wrong,” Selene whispered. “I knew so little back then. If you think I didn’t regret it every single day since the day you died for the first time—”

“And yet you did nothing to help me!” Tears burned Astrea’s eyes.

“I did—what I could.”

“Not enough, apparently!” The daughter locked eyes with her mother again, nothing but hatred in her eyes. “Well, at least you came for the wedding! Maybe he won’t kill me by the end of the ceremony! Fingers crossed!”

Selene dug her fingernails deeper into her flesh as if warning her. “He won’t.”

“This is useless,” Astrea muttered and tried to free her hand, but Selene grasped her wrist, her gaze on the bracelets and the ring.

Something twisted in the pit of Astrea’s stomach. How could she be so careless with that woman? Maybe her mother did not know what the bracelets were, but she surely recognised her own ring!

“Leave us!” Selene ordered the four men who followed them, and they stumbled, unsure whether they should listen to her.

“My apologies,” the tallest of them bowed, “we only follow orders of Vidar, The All-Father.”

“He's not yet a father to be called that. Only one god had that name,” the Moon Goddess replied calmly. “But if you insist, didn’t the Ruler of Asgard tell you to make me feel at home when I arrived?”

“Yes, he did,” the Asgardian replied, dipping his head in his shoulders.

“So, let me inform you that I would never be comfortable at my home with four strangers following me this closely. I understand you must do your job, but why don’t you take twenty steps back? You will still be able to see us and perform your duties, but without disturbing me or my daughter.”

The guardians exchanged glances and backed away synchronously, allowing the two women more space.

“We have a similar taste in jewellery.” Selene returned her gaze to Astrea, and the latter yanked her hand away, ready to fight now if she had to.

“That’s—”

“The mate bond wasn’t a mistake,” the Moon Goddess turned away to look at the sea behind the cliff they were on as if nothing special was going on between them. “Don’t get me wrong, I know that mating you to Vidar was one. But the mate bond, in general, can be a beautiful thing. It became a beautiful thing for so many.”

Astrea rolled her eyes but said nothing. Before all this, before she met Fenrir and got her memories back, she had once dreamt of a mate, too. Now, she wanted to laugh at her past self.

“Your bond was the first one, and I thought you and Vidar would be a splendid match. I believed I planned all that so perfectly. An heir of Asgard and the future of Olympians—I almost believed it was written in the stars.”

Astrea fidgeted with the ring on her finger, her nerves getting the better of her. She wanted to be done here as soon as possible.

“I forgot only one thing—” Selene clasped her hands tightly together, interlocking her fingers as if that was supposed to give her strength, “to ask my daughter, the Star Goddess, about all that.”

“That you did.”

“I was thousands of years old and truly believed I knew better. If I could turn back time—”

“But you can,” Astrea let out a mocking laugh. “You did it for Riannon!”

“I love Riannon,” Selene admitted. “She is the perfect Luna, one of the best she-wolves I have seen, but—when I turned back time to bring her back just one year, it weakened me immensely. I wouldn’t be able to repeat that any time soon. And I didn’t do it for her alone. Not really... I did it for you and for the mortals in general. I brought Ria back because she started a chain reaction of changes that helped me to fix so much of Vidar’s and Joran’s work. Those boys—”

Astrea did not allow a single muscle on her face to flinch despite the waves of shock ripping through her body.

“You are not serious!”

“I am. Freyja told me it was your last life, and I became desperate. I was always carefully choosing the families for you to be born in, but each time it was a waste of effort. This life, I was sure I thought of everything. I even gave you a twin to—”

She stopped talking but Astrea realised what she meant, memories of her sister Stella flooding her brain.

“No!” She rubbed her temples, not wishing for these dark thoughts to break her now when she needed to be strong. “You don’t mean—You couldn’t!”

“I am sorry.” Selene watched tears rolling down her daughter’s cheeks. “She was a sweet child, and I set her for the best new life possible after Vidar’s monsters killed her. He thought she was you, and I thought that you would have a chance this time if he kept believing that.”

“You let him kill Stella instead of me—” she whispered what was the equivalent of a knife piercing her heart.

“There was no choice! Vidar tainted everything he touched. He weakened our realm, and his is barely holding up. He took all the power and—”

“Listen to yourself!” Astrea raised her voice, desperation overwhelming her. “She was just a child! And you—you are a monster!”

Selene held her gaze with an unwavering determination.

“I am a mother,” she corrected. “But I am a mother not only to you but to many others, and my life goal is to take care of as many of you as I can. That’s a burden I carry with me. I am not perfect, and I made my fair share of mistakes, but I am trying, As—Astrea. After what happened to you, I made it possible for mates to reject each other. I gave them a choice regardless of me connecting their souls. And I am sorry I cannot give this to you because you were first, and Vidar never died, making your bond unbreakable. You are still attached to him every time you are reborn. I wish I could break it, but it’s impossible since he is a god too. Therefore—I made a deal with Joran. It cost me a mate bond I did not plan to create.”

“Yeah, I heard,” Astrea frowned. “You ruined quite a few lives doing so, you know.”

“It all turned out well in the end. Besides, look at you. You are stronger than ever before, and you need this for what’s coming. I only hope you will let me be by your side.”

She contemplated for a few moments.

“I can’t trust you. Not anymore. Probably not ever. You took so much from me; you let Fenrir and me suffer for so long to prove a point. One conversation is not enough to mend what was broken.”

“I know, and I understand.” Selene nodded and then pulled her daughter into a hug roughly so that she didn’t have time to push her away.

“What are you—” Astrea grunted, wishing to distance herself as soon as possible.

“Your friend is not here,” Selene whispered. “Vidar doesn’t have her. He wants you to believe that so that you are compliant. She is still in the mortal realm and is supposed to be by Fenrir’s side.

Astrea froze.

“How do you—”

“It doesn’t matter. What matters is that you need to get to the Source of power behind the main palace, and it will be heavily guarded at night, so choose a different time.”

“I don’t need your advice!”

“But you do. Vidar wants the wedding to go smoothly. Whatever happens, do not let him mix your blood. He... he doesn’t love you. You cannot share your power with a man who has no feelings for you.”

“Don’t worry, I won’t,” her daughter promised, frustrated by the fresh revelations. She glanced at her mother with her brows furrowed, unsure whether she could believe her.

“I know you don’t trust me, and I can never blame you for this,” the Moon Goddess confessed. “But I want you to know that I did anything possible to help you and will keep doing it. I will be on your side even if you never want to see me again. However much I crave your forgiveness, I need to see you happy more. Use my ring right, Astrea, and—be happy when all is done.”

Astrea did not know how to respond. Her mother was always a sweet-talker, and yet it felt different now. She could feel her pain. She saw it in the woman’s eyes.

However, trust had to be earned, and they couldn’t reach this point with one conversation.

“I need to go,” she said, and Selene withdrew from her with a reserved smile curving her lips.

“I will be there,” she added. “Waiting.”

This time, Astrea decided to stay silent, as she needed to think everything over.

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She had to take another bath to clean herself after the remnants of the Glowing Garden and was served dinner back in her room. Luckily, Vidar was too busy to keep her company.

The maids looked as terrified as before, which, she realised after carefully contemplating, was helpful to her.

Sleep wasn’t an option, and she wanted to try escaping over the roofs like she usually did. Still, a quick observation session through her windows allowed her to notice several guards spying on her from different angles.

Usually, that number of men to kill wouldn’t have bothered her, but this wouldn’t be a fair fight since at least some of them were minor deities, thus much stronger than her mortal body. Again, she had a plan for that, too, but there would be only one shot at this. They would have officially lost if she got caught, and everything would be over for her, Fenrir and the mortal realm.

The morning came faster than she realised, and the maids walked back in with covered trays to prepare her for the wedding ritual.

Astrea observed them with her hands folded over her chest, a mask of indifference on her face.

“Let us help you with your hair,” the oldest woman suggested, and she nodded in agreement, allowing them to put a beautiful star crown halo into her hair. She pulled on the tight white undergarments they offered and let them rub lotions on her body, making her skin shimmer like diamonds.

“Just your bridal make-up is left,” the same woman chirped with a wide smile on her face. “Allow us to—”

“Enough!” Astrea raised her hand to make them stop in their tracks. “It’s getting tiring, and I already have a headache, thanks to you.”

The women exchanged uncomfortable glances.

“I will do the makeup myself,” Astrea announced, and they dropped to their knees again.

“Please, my Queen, we have precise instructions!”

“If something is not to Vidar’s taste—”

She closed her eyes and pinched the bridge of her nose, showing them how much they irritated the future wife of their ruler.

A few moments more and they would be ready to agree to anything she proposes as long as it was remotely reasonable.

“Her!” She pointed to the youngest maid with blonde hair, who shook when she realised she had been chosen for a potentially deadly mission. “Does she know the instructions?”

They did not want to reply, disappointed with how things were developing.

“Does she?” Astrea made her voice sharper, trying to scare them more.

“Y-yes.” Finally, the Head Maid admitted, looking at her colleague with pity.

“P-please, I—” The chosen maid stuttered. “Maybe it’s best if you choose someone else to—”

“You stay to help me. Everyone else leaves!” Astrea commanded and Nova added a growl, making all the women rush out of the room.

All but one.

She waited for the doors to close and nodded at the vanity table, causing the little maid to get back to her feet.

“What are you waiting for? Do your job.”

Playing an arrogant, heartless as\*hole wasn’t her first. Astrea watched the maid open the bottles with cosmetics and arrange the brushes when she crushed the first bead, activating the veil of silence in the room. From now on, no one would be able to hear what was going on here. Just like Fenrir taught her.

The girl was shaking like a leaf during a storm, and Astrea felt so guilty. She never hurt the innocent; this time, she had to make an exception.



“What is your name?” she asked lazily. As if she wasn’t really interested.

“Nora, m-my Queen.” The maid tried to control her voice, but it still came out shaky. She picked the first brushes and exhaled sharply as if gathering all her strength and confidence, but when she turned to face Astrea, the woman was already there, towering over her.

“You are not a minor goddess, Nora, right?” The Dragonfly tilted her head, playing with another bead in her fingers.

“G-goddess? M-me? No,” the girl shook her head, her dread palpable.

“Good,” Astrea nodded and crushed the second bead, grasping the maid’s hand. “If you play your cards right, Nora, you are going to survive this. I really hope that you do!”

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Vidar looked at the sparkling white marble road leading to the Halls of Valhalla. It was time to go downstairs, as his bride was supposed to be on her way.

A young woman who looked like Nikki, whom he failed to get as he had recently found out, stood beside him, dressed in mortal realm jeans and a black leather jacket. It had to do for now. He would have to figure something else later, though, to keep his wife on a leash.

“Cover her face better,” the God of Vengeance ordered. “I want Astraea to see her right before she walks in.”

She was already supposed to be in the middle of the marble path. It was time, and everyone who mattered waited for them downstairs. Although it was predictable Astraea would be late.

“Any news from my bride?” he asked one of his loyal advisors.

“She was a bit stubborn in the morning,” the man replied. “But it had been handled. She must be on her way. Any minute now.”

He could wait a minute. Vidar had waited millennia for this.

Still, it was hard to believe he would get what was rightfully his after all this time. Doubt crept into his soul. Wasn’t it too good to be true?

Then, at last, he saw the procession walking out of the Queen’s part of the palace. Several maids dressed in pale golden dresses at the front and an equal amount at the back. Right between them, where she was supposed to be, walked his mate with her head cast down and covered with a thin veil.

For a moment there, Vidar was afraid it wasn’t her, but when his man used a mirror to reflect sunshine on her face to bring her attention to them, she looked up. Primal fear was in her eyes

when she saw him holding who she thought was Nikki by the hair. He shook the woman in his grasp for a more dramatic effect and then threw her to the ground so that Astraea couldn't see her face.

His bride looked down again, clasping her hands at the front, which indicated his final victory. At last.

Vidar walked down the spiralling stairs straight into the main hall of Valhalla, making everyone stand in his presence as he took his position at the chancel. He had ruled over New Asgard for so long, but this day was incredibly satisfying. His right to rule, powers, and decisions had always been questioned.

Today would be the day it ended.

Once his blood mixed with Astraea's and he got her powers from the source, no one would object to him ever again. Not to mention that the woman he craved more than anything would finally be at his mercy.

This was indeed too good to be true.

The doors opened, and the maids stepped aside, letting their Queen walk towards her future husband.

She was mesmerising in the silk dress he chose for her. It was too tight for her so that she wouldn't be able to have too much freedom of movement and also to make it easier to rip it off her body later when they were alone.

The veil covered her face, but it was her. Her sharp chin, plump rosy lips, her hair that looked like starlight... too short for his liking, but he would help her grow it back tonight so that it was easier to pull in during their first official night.

She was visibly shaking, and he was delighted.

That woman would be his victory. Once and for all.

She took too long to get to him, and he was growing tired. Too many important guests watched him triumph to let his irritation slip, though.

Finally, she was by his side in what seemed like an eternity, and he grabbed her small, icy hand, drawing his thumb over her skin, causing a rush of goosebumps to appear. He liked her that way. Trembling and obedient.

"You look divine, my love," he said, leaning down to her to remove her veil.

"No," she whispered, her tone begging and eyes desperate. Beautiful brown eyes...

The realisation came crashing down on him like a thunderstorm on a tranquil day. Astraea's eyes were divine blue...

He yanked the woman closer to him, causing the magic on her face to dissipate and reveal the much plainer features of a young, terrified girl.

“Who are you?” he growled at her, tears streaming down her face.

“I did not want to!” she stammered. “She made me! I—It was some kind of spell! Please!”

“Where is she?” He asked menacingly, ready to kill the imposter.

The Halls of Valhalla burst into waves of whispers. Right when the alarm bells of the Source started ringing loudly through the air.

Now he knew where she was.

Vidar pushed the girl to the ground, and she scrambled away on her knees in the dress that someone as low as her was not supposed to even touch, let alone wear.

However, he did not have time for this. He had a bride to drag here by her short silver hair.

She couldn't just let him be nice to her. She had to make this hard and ugly.

“Everyone, stay in your places!” Vidar announced. “My beautiful future wife decided to play one last game with me. Didn't she, Mother-In-Law?”

His glare landed on Selene, who nodded calmly in response.

“Olympian tradition,” she lied on the spot. “You want a bride, you catch her.”

“Consider it done!” Vidar gritted his teeth and was ready to leave when a loud growl made his blood freeze in his veins.

No, it couldn't be...