

A Gift from the Goddess by Dawn Rosewood Chapter 1

Chapter One

"It looks like everyone is here now," Aleric said, projecting into the crowd. "We are gathered here today to bear witness to the trial of Ariadne Chrysalis, former Luna to the Winter Mist pack."

His eyes scanned over the faces of everyone around before finally landing on me.

"Do you swear on the Goddess' name, Ariadne, that you will tell the whole truth during this trial?" Aleric asked.

I met his piercing green eyes, a shiver going down my spine. How those eyes haunted me.

"I do," I replied loudly and confidently.

"And how do you plead?"

I held my breath, my heart racing in my chest.

"Not guilty."

"She's pregnant," Aleric told me.

I stared at him in shock, my face paling. My destined mate, the love of my life, was telling me that he had gotten a girl pregnant. A girl who was not me.

It was like a kick to the gut. The mate bond made the weight of his words tortuous and my inner wolf howled out in pain. I had given everything to Aleric, suffered everything for him. And yet here he was, standing in front of me, telling me such excruciating news as if he were telling me the time of day.

"Why?" I whispered, tears brimming in my eyes.

"I don't need to explain myself to you," Aleric said sharply. "You couldn't even fulfil all your duties as my mate, as a Luna. Don't start acting as if this is a surprise. The pack needs an Alpha heir. Something you are incapable of, Ariadne."

His words stung, twisting deep into my flesh like a knife. We had been officially mated for six years now and it was true... I had failed to bear him a child. It wasn't as though I hadn't wanted to though. For months after we had officially found out about the mate bond, I would try everything to be with him as much as possible. But he was never interested in me, I could see that clearly. I knew he was only with me because I was the rightful Luna.

But there was something else I knew too. Something no mate should ever have to live with.

And that was that I knew about his mistress; Thea.

Aleric and Thea had known each other since before we were officially mated and I could plainly see how he doted on her over me. Gave her the love that was rightfully mine, looking at her as if she were his sun. But every part of my being loved him even if he did not love me. And yet, by some futile dream, I remained hopeful that he would warm to me once I bore him a child. After all, I was the rightful Luna and his mate.

I went to the pack doctor a year after failing to conceive and he confirmed my worst fears; I was unable to bear children. I didn't know what to do, how to keep going. This was the one thing that I had pinned all my hopes on for my fate to change, for Aleric to change. The news of my infertility was kept only within the high ranks of the pack thankfully, but I'd never seen my father, the Beta, look so disappointed in me.

I had tried everything to keep Aleric's attention despite the news. I lost weight, tried to make myself prettier, and dedicated myself to my Luna duties. We were the most successful pack in the country and a part of that was due to me. I thought if I could make him successful then he would pay me back in kind. However, the longer time went on, the colder and more aggressive he became.

Whenever he had laid with me in the past, it had always been cold, clinical, as if he were performing a duty rather than enjoying himself. But then everything changed once he learned of my infertility, his visits soon completely stopping. Those short moments he had once indulged me had been everything to me. They were the only times he had ever touched me with intimacy. My skin would send sparks wherever our bodies met, and his scent would intoxicate me.

This was the curse of the mate bond.

"...But I love you, Aleric," I said, my voice barely audible.

I couldn't meet his cold green eyes as my legs began to shake. I could feel inside that my wolf was crushed, feeling her pain mixed in with mine.

It was suffocating.

"Don't be pathetic," he scoffed. "You should count yourself lucky I'm not removing you of your Luna position for Thea. The Goddess still chose you to be Luna, even if she was wrong."

I flinched at his words.

“However,” he continued, “I need to inform you that I will be making Thea’s child my rightful heir. The elders have deemed this appropriate given the circumstances. They understand how important this baby is for the survival of the pack.”

I bowed my head to him in submission, tears quietly streaming down my face. I needed to leave, to get away from him, but I was held in place by his presence. Even after everything he had done to me, I still relished in him even talking to me. The bond between Luna and Alpha was strong, and it caused me to still love him even now. Even though every part of me wanted to scream at him, to hit him, to claw his eyes out for hurting me.

“We have a pack meeting tomorrow morning at eight. Don’t be late,” he said finally before walking out of the packhouse. He didn’t even glance twice at me as he left.

No apology, no sympathy. Aleric would rather see me suffer than give me even an ounce of love or affection. I was a Luna, *his* Luna, and a queen in the eyes of our pack, but he could not even spare me the decency of a glance. His lack of respect for me was evident.

Not being able to stand it any longer, I decided to do the only thing I could do in this situation; run from it all... if only for a few hours.

I ran outside into the forest as the cold fresh air hit my face immediately, something I breathed in greedily to help clear my head. It was nice, apart from the wind that bit at my cheeks where my tears had fallen, forcing a chill through my body. But it didn’t end up stinging for long as I shifted into my wolf.

Her pads hit the cold ground fast as she sprinted through the woods. I gave her full control as I knew she needed this. She needed to feel free and alive. We were both trapped by our position, our duty, our mate. We had sacrificed everything for our pack, everything for him, and it was all for nothing.

Even if it were possible to bear him a child now, I knew they would be thrown aside – just as how I had been discarded. I could see now that it had been for the best that I brought no children into this family. No child would make his feelings for me change; it was naive of me to think so before. This was the first time I’d ever been thankful for my infertility.

I was in an impossible situation. Every part of me wanted to run away, but I knew my pack needed me. In fact, I knew damn well that Thea would burn this pack to the ground if she became Luna. She hadn’t had any training and I was yet to witness a single intelligent remark from the girl. Literally about anything.

But what about my own mental health? Hadn’t I suffered enough? Four years was way too long to wear my heart on my sleeve for Aleric. He had made a mockery of my love for him and couldn’t even respect me out of duty anymore.

My wolf continued to run as I mulled over my internal debate. She hunted rabbits and sniffed at the different scents, taking it all in so she could try and forget everything that had happened.

Her white fur kept us warm against the wind, now becoming colder as darkness crept up, and I knew we would need to head back soon. But I didn't want to subject her to that just yet. For just a little while longer, I wanted her to forget about everything waiting for us back at the house.

Another hour passed and I accepted it was finally time. I gently nudged her in my head to indicate we should head home but she let out a low growl to tell me she wasn't pleased with this idea. Not that I blamed her. Unfortunately, I had to remind her that we needed to get home for dinner or Sophie would begin to worry. With a final whimper of annoyance, she begrudgingly turned back towards the packhouse.

However, as we went to leave, I noticed something in the trees. A woman with golden hair was standing there, wearing a white dress, watching me intently.

My wolf instantly sent out a warning growl; neither of us recognising nor sensing her. Yet the most unnerving part was we couldn't smell her scent. We should have definitely been able to smell her from here.

In response, the woman proceeded to neither reply nor even flinch, prompting us to do only one thing. The only thing we *could* do.

...We ran towards her.

My wolf's paws sprinted faster and faster, our heartbeat racing in our chest, sensing something was off.

How had she even managed to get past the border patrols? Something was wrong.

We weren't very good fighters, but if it meant protecting the pack then, at the very least, we would need to investigate.

Or, at least, *try* to.

...Because, in the end, we were too late.

Before we could even come close, the woman turned her back and hid behind the trees, leaving absolutely nothing behind. No woman, no lingering scent, nothing. It was as if no one had been there at all. Had we only imagined the whole thing?

Admittedly, we had just gone through something extremely traumatic, making it entirely possible that we were just seeing things. Our mind had been pushed to the brink and I knew we were close to snapping.

Quickly, I urged my wolf to return home, and was grateful when she didn't need to be told twice this time. Neither of us wanted another experience like what we had just seen.

I did debate in my mind whether it was worth raising an alarm with the border patrol to investigate, but ultimately, I decided against it. I knew the news of Thea's pregnancy would have spread by now, making people begin to look at me with pity. And whilst pity was one thing, I couldn't risk them looking at me like I was insane. I was a *Luna*, my position now hanging by a thread. I couldn't provide another reason for the pack to doubt me.

But, after the already traumatic day I'd had, I couldn't anticipate what was waiting for me at the packhouse.

After I shifted back and dressed again, I headed into the house, seeing something that made me immediately stop dead in my tracks.

Because it was as I walked inside that her scent immediately hit me, a sugary sweet smell that always made my nose wrinkle.