

## A Gift from the Goddess by Dawn Rosewood Chapter 18

### Chapter Eighteen

I woke up to the feeling of someone lightly shaking my shoulder.

I wanted to protest against the touch, refuse to open my eyes, but the shaking was insistent.

“Aria?” a voice called to me.

It was familiar and warm. It sounded like home.

I managed to open my eyes a bit, fighting against the bright artificial light that assaulted me as I did so. But after several seconds of adjusting, I managed to make out the face of my mother.

“Aria?” she called again.

“I’m alive...?” I said, my throat dry and sore.

She quickly brought some water to my lips and I began to sip on it, enjoying the refreshing feeling that came with it.

“How are you feeling?” she asked as she began to look over my body, making several notes in a chart by the bed.

How was I feeling? I was sure I had died again. I was in the Abyss, I saw the memory. It was just like how it had felt last time.

...So, how was I feeling?

I felt confused by the entire situation right now.

“I should be dead,” I replied.

She instantly turned to look at me, a little shocked by my blunt response.

“Don’t say such an awful thing,” my mother said, her eyes full of concern. “You’ve fully recovered, there’s no need to say something like that.”

Did this mean I was never in the Abyss? Had it just been a nightmare the entire time?

My mother looked like she wanted to say something else, but she was debating internally.

"You know...as a doctor, I'm happy to see that you've healed so well, but...as a mother, I want to scold you for stupidly running into danger like you did. What were you thinking, Aria?"

I already realised it was dumb the second I came face-to-face with the sandy wolf. She didn't really need to scold me further. On the other hand though, if I hadn't been there then there was a good chance Cai would have died fighting off all four wolves, or Myra would have been killed.

Towed my life to him for saving me. I was sure I was only still alive because of the effort he had put into

stopping the bleeding, not to mention how he'd carried me through the forest.

And with a horrible realisation, I remembered then that Cai had been seriously injured to

"Is Cai okay?" I asked.

Her face changed to one of concern and my heart sank.

"He was in very bad shape... but after a day he was able to walk around again. I've instructed for him to take it easy over the next week or so."

I was glad to hear he was going to be fine but I was confused at her words.

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"...Did you say 'day'? How long have I been out?"

"You've been unconscious for three days now."

Three days?! I couldn't believe it had been so long already. Time really was uncertain when inside the Abyss. Even if it was only a dreamed up, fever version.

"Aria... there's something else that we need to discuss," she said. "I've been trying hard to come up with other explanations for it but I'm at a loss. The entire upper-rank council is demanding answers too."

I frowned. What could be so serious that it would make the council become so agitated?

"...What is it?"

"We found something on your body... It looks like you've been marked."

If my jaw could have hit the floor, then I'm sure it would have. What she was saying was impossible

"What?! How is that possible? I haven't even been close to any men."

"No, no, not that sort of marking," she explained.

I was definitely relieved to hear her say that. I was way too young to be going around with a mate's mark on me. Not only that, but sure Aleric would have had a field day using it against me for his future torment.

"You seem to have been marked on your back... with a double moon crescent."

And, internally, I cringed.

I wanted to curse the Goddess. So much for letting me choose my own fate. She seemed to have plans of forcing me to stick around regardless

If what my mother was telling me was true, then it would appear the Goddess had now marked me as her own. Any plans to run away in the future were now nearly impossible.

"Do you know what that means, Aria?"

I knew what it meant, of course. She was asking me because it was virtually unheard of and wouldn't expect a fourteen year old to know. No one had seen the Goddess' mark in over a millennium and even then, the accounts were iffy at best. I learnt about it very vaguely during my Luna studies and knew the ramifications it held. However, it was basically considered a myth these days.

I nodded my head at her. My life was about to become infinitely more difficult now.

"Do you know why you were marked?"

I could hear the worry in her voice and couldn't imagine what she must have gone through finding this out. All the ranked members and elders would be pressuring my parents for information whilst trying to figure out what this meant for the pack.

I didn't want to lie to her, but I also didn't want to break her heart by telling her my story either. I wanted things to be normal between us. I wanted her to care for me in the same way she had in the past. If she knew I was actually twenty-four, would she be frightened by me?

I bit the inside of my cheek and shrugged my shoulder, not knowing what to say.

She hesitated at the reaction but, thankfully, didn't push the topic any further.

"Okay... Well, the Alpha has requested your presence as soon as possible to urgently discuss the attack," she said. "You've physically healed fine, but I was worried about your mental state given the coma you were in. Do you feel up for meeting with him?"

I thought about it for a few moments. Did I want to meet with him? Not particularly. But I knew it was

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something unavoidable that I would need to do eventually. I felt completely fine other than the shock and stress that came from the recent mark revelation.

"I can meet with him," I confirmed.

"Okay, I'll have someone come help you get ready. They'll probably want to meet with you within the next hour or so."

So soon. But I knew why they needed me on such short notice. They would want to know how I knew the attack was about to happen and any information as to who was behind it. Time was of the essence when it came to possible war.

I managed to get ready very quickly but took a few moments to look at the mark for myself. It was silver and in the shape of two crescent moons facing outwards, the symbol of Selene, the Goddess. The nurse that was helping me change even gasped a little when she saw it, but I tried to ignore her.

It wasn't long after that I found myself entering the meeting hall. It was a familiar place given that I had been here almost every week in my previous life. I knew every crack in the walls, every line in the wood of the table. It was so strange to be entering now and not taking my seat to the right of where the Alpha sat. However, I knew that the seat reserved for the Luna would be empty this time; the Alpha's mate having died many years ago.

When I entered, I immediately spotted Cai standing in the centre before the council. I was so grateful to see him and walked over to join him. The Alpha hadn't arrived yet so many members were talking quietly amongst themselves.

"Cai! I'm so glad to see you're safe!" | greeted him in a hushed voice.

| smiled up at him, but he wasn't meeting my eyes. Was he... ignoring me?

“Cai?” I pressed again.

My father then caught my attention as he gave me a concerned nod. I smiled back politely and held my hand up in a small wave to reassure him I was okay.

“You should have told me,” Cai finally said, his tone harsh and emotionless.

Oh... he was still mad at me for fighting when I was possibly Aleric's future mate.

“I don't think you understand how little Aleric cares for me. You really had nothing to worry about.”

“You don't get to decide what may or may not impact my pack,” he snapped, finally turning to look at me.

His eyes were angry and reminded me of the vision in the Abyss. A thought bad enough to send a shiver down my spine.

But it had just been a fever nightmare, there was nothing to worry about. It wasn't even a true memory.

“Even if Aleric didn't care,” he said continuing, “are you telling me that your father, the Beta, wouldn't? Are you telling me your pack wouldn't care that the ‘Saintess’ of the Winter Mist was killed because I stupidly let a child go into battle?”

Saintess'. I recoiled at the word. Only an hour after finding out about the mark myself, the word was already being thrown out into the public. Moreover, it hadn't even been confirmed yet, so it was a low blow by him.

He was right about my father though. I hadn't considered it at the time because my only thought had been of saving Myra, but my father definitely would have been furious with Cai and demanded retribution. I needed to have accepted that I was weak, that I wasn't as good of a fighter as I had thought. From Cai's perspective, I could understand completely now why he was furious.

“Cai...I'm sorry...,” I said sincerely. “I want you to know I really th—.”

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However, I didn't get to finish my sentence as, suddenly, the door behind us opened and the Alpha entered.

Alpha Tytus, Aleric's father.

