

The Alpha God's Luna by Marissa Gilbert

Chapter 48

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Chapter 48. Game Changer

Salome couldn't hold back her tears as she escaped to the front garden and sat next to Fenrir's favourite fountain. The plan was so simple, but everything went wrong. Ever since Astrea left with the Serpent, she couldn't find a place for herself. Getting rid of her rival was never supposed to feel like this.

She was miserable. It did not feel like a victory at all. It did not help that all her friends seemed to know what she had done. And none of them approved.

Bash, who was initially on her side, couldn't look at her anymore. Kara pretended she did not exist. Devoss stopped making jokes, which was probably the worst sign of all.

Of course, they all guessed what she had done.

A heavy hand lay on her shoulder, and she didn't flinch, knowing it could only be one person.

"There is no use in crying now. What's done is done," Warg told her, taking a seat next to her on the stone bench. The witch couldn't face him, so she only glanced at the water's reflection. "I only wanted to protect Solace and Fenrir," she whispered, knowing that only a part of it was true. "I'll tell you something," taking her tiny hand into his large one, squeezing it gently. "I know what he means to you. And don't think I do not know how it feels to see him looking at Astrea the way he never looked at you. I get it."

She swallowed nervously as a needle of jealousy pierced her heart again.

“Sal, I am old enough to know a thing or two. So, listen to the words of the first lycan ever to exist. He will never love you the way you want him to, but don’t let that pain turn you into a monster. It’s an ugly feeling to want something another person has, and you have to fight it. Maybe one day you will stop loving him. Maybe you will love him forever—”

She sucked in a sharp breath, shuddering at the thought. “But one thing is for sure,” Warg continued, “he doesn’t deserve all the horrible things that keep happening to him. You know it, and so do I. Fenrir is a good man. He is a better man than most, even when he is not trying, and when he does... he builds civilisations. He has sacrificed himself so many times, and in this regard, even you must agree they are similar. She left so that the Solace stood untouched. We could have defended ourselves here for at least a couple of days, but she decided not to take any chances. She believed in him enough to step away from the safety into his brother’s arms. He will be back, and he will find her again. He always does. This is one constant I will always count on, but you know what?”

She avoided his gaze because he was right about everything; it was a hard pill to swallow.

Warg cupped her chin and made her look at him, wiping her tears away with his free hand.

“You are a good person, too, Salome,” he insisted.

“Not anymore!” She tried to turn away, but he didn’t let her. “You’ve made a wrong choice, but it was just one day in your life. No one is perfect,” Warg said, and she finally brought herself up to meet his gaze. “Remember this day forever. Remember what you feel now. And make it count. Work every day to fix this until you do, and never repeat it afterwards.”

“Warg,” another tear rolled down her cheek, “he will never forgive me—”

“This is where you are wrong. Fenrir is all about second chances. “ The lycan smiled at her, and this was so rare for him that it made the corners of her lips tilt upwards, too.

“Warg, you are the only one who —” She wanted to tell him so much, but the air thickened, and she felt powerful energy swirling right next to them. The portal became visible in just a few moments, and Fenrir walked out of it with a chain wrapped around his hand.

“Tell him the truth,” Warg whispered while the wind settled

down. “And know that I am here for you, no matter what.” Fenrir looked around expectantly, and Salome knew who he was looking for as the disappointment painted itself all over his face. The guilt settled at the pit of her stomach.

“She is not here,” the witch said quietly as their eyes locked.

“You’ve got some nerve to speak to me after all your tricks,” the Rogue King snarled at her.

“Fenrir, I’m so sorry,” she muttered, seeing how he clenched his fists and pursed his lips. “Astrea left with your brother. He burned down Raja and—”

“And you betrayed me,” he interrupted her, watching the colour drain from her cheeks. She could see fire coursing through his veins.

“I thought—”

“I don’t have time for this!” The man ignored her, walking past her. She knew it was probably better than him lashing out at her, but on the other hand, it made her feel so... insignificant.

Kara and Devoss greeted him in the house with the latest reports of the recent event, which only made Fenrir angrier. His lips twitched while he listened to how Astrea sacrificed herself to ensure Solace’s safety and how the people remaining in Raja were slaughtered. “Where is my son?” he asked dryly.

“Bash went to mobilise the army,” Devoss replied. “Rir, I am so sorry we failed you—”

“Only one person failed me—” He frowned, going straight into his office, where his friends followed him.

“At least we accepted everyone who made the cut before the breach,” Devoss tried to reassure him, seeing how he was barely holding back. “And now your brother thinks he broke all our army when it was just a fraction.”

“It’s still a loss,” Fenrir threw Gleipnir on his desk.

“is that what I think it is?” Kara furrowed her brows, and he nodded in response, checking the beads on his bracelet. He was going to need all of them for this. A plan was already forming in his head, but he needed to review all the details before acting.

“We are going to get her back,” Devoss promised. “Rir, she is a tough cookie. You should have seen her—”

“If I saw her, she would be here with me now.” The wolf gritted his teeth.

“Listen,” Warg stepped forward, wearing his usual calm expression, “Salome—”

“Salome will have to search for a way to redeem herself before she shows herself before my eyes again,” Fenrir growled. “I banish her from Solace, and I am not punishing her harder out of my respect for you and for her previous achievements. But let’s not forget that a place in Solace should be earned. She just lost hers.”

Warg knew when not to push his creator, so he bowed his head and left.

Neither Kara nor Devoss argued the decision, knowing there was no point.

“We are going to the South, aren’t we?” The Valkyrie crossed her arms over her chest, sighing heavily.

“Yes, we are,” Fenrir confirmed. “They paid us a visit and took something of ours. We have to repay the favour and get Astrea back.”

“Sounds reasonable to me!” Devoss smirked. “That old fox needs new suits.”

“I doubt there will be any left after I am done with them.” Fenrir chuckled menacingly.

They started strategizing, thinking of different case scenarios and trying to predict every possible situation, knowing this wouldn’t be a simple mission. They wouldn’t be playing on their turf.

Hours passed, and Fenrir opened the top drawer of his desk in search of an old map, noticing an envelope that definitely did not belong there.

His hand flexed before he touched it as a familiar scent engulfed him. Astrea’s scent.

“When did she— His voice broke in the middle of a sentence. His friends looked at him with concern, seeing the letter and realising what happened.

“You know what,” Devoss’ voice sounded very high-pitched, “we will leave you alone to read it. We have to make the necessary arrangements, anyway.”

She always had this effect on him and his life. She was there with him, even if they were apart, her presence undeniable. There was only one piece of paper inside with handwriting he would recognise anywhere making him clench it tighter.

Dear Fenrir,

Though our paths crossed only recently, / feel as though we have known each other for eternity. I have no mate, but my soul is bound to you. I wish / could do as you asked, choose you and five in Solace forever, but! would do you and your life’s work a disservice. Everything I touch dies, and I want you to live.

! want you to be happy, Fenrir.

Promise you will be happy whatever happens.

I never said those words to anyone, and you deserved to hear them from me, but here they are in writing so that you know how I felt on the day / knew I couldn't stay.

I think I love you.

She crossed out those words, replacing them with new ones.

I love you so much it hurts to think about it.

Thank you for being you and for making me experience emotions I wasn't sure I was capable of.

Forever yours, Astrea.

P.S. I left something for you on the northern border. Find a dead oak tree, and you will find my little gift in its roots. I didn't know what to do with this, but something tells me you will. 23.4162 N, 25.6628 E.

He wanted to crumple the letter, but as always, destroying anything of Astraea's was too much for him. Let alone a love confession. He wasn't even sure when she wrote that letter. Not that it mattered. Now that he was thinking about it, she probably left it when she went to meet the other dragonflies. What mattered the most, however, was to check what kind of farewell gift she had prepared for him this time. She wouldn't have sent him to the border if she didn't think it was important. She also hadn't gone there on his watch, so it meant she left that thing there before they met and only disclosed the location to him now.

"My hands are too pretty for this!" Devoss complained while digging in the roots of a dried oak tree, just like the letter instructed. "There are so many bugs in here. Why are there so many?"

"They like you," Fenrir rolled his eyes, "what takes you so long?"

"So many things!" The fox muttered under his breath. "For instance, we have no idea what we are looking for." Fenrir exhaled heavily, not gracing him with a response as he searched on the other side. They were there for a while but still found nothing, making him wonder if it was a

good idea to waste their time here, when they needed to be preparing to go to the Southern Lycan Republic.

He almost gave up when he felt a powerful source of energy not so far away. Fenrir closed his eyes not to be distracted and relied on what he felt instead of what he saw, inserting his hand deeply under the tree, and finally, he touched it, feeling the familiar energy. He grabbed the dirt and dried grass around the object and pulled his hand out, unclenching his fingers to see what all the fuss was about.

“It can’t be —” he muttered, shocked by his discovery. “What is it?” Devoss leaned lower to see Astrea’s gift better. “It’s just what I needed, Dev. A game changer!”

When Joran came to his penthouse, he found Astrea chatting with Nikki and no Bjorn in sight. She was in a far better mood than he expected, and he caught himself in the thought that this was how he wanted to come back home every day.

However, the moment she noticed him, the smile dropped from her pretty face, replacing the warmth in her eyes she had for her ward with the coldness she had prepared for him.

“Teacher,” she greeted him, knowing how much that title annoyed him now, but after his conversation with Vidar, he knew better than to be unhappy about it. He had to treasure every moment he got.

“Where is Darius?” He arched a brow at Nikki, who stood up and lowered her head immediately.

“He is in his room minding his own business as he should be!” Astrea stood between him and his ward. “That bear is not a baby, you know. He’ll manage.”

Joran decided to ignore that attitude, too.

“Tomorrow, we are all going to an event to celebrate the late High Chancellor Lothgar,” he informed them. “You are throwing him a party instead of a funeral?” Astrea scoffed.

“His achievements should be celebrated.” Joran went straight to the bar and poured himself a glass of his strongest whiskey. “Nikki, you will go with Darius.”

“Does she have to?” the Dragonfly stood up, fisting her hands.

“Yes, she has to because this is her work!” He took a sip without looking at her. “And you have to go to because—”

He stopped before he said something wrong again. “Because otherwise, you will strangle me. I know.” She smirked, narrowing her eyes. He hated it.

“Go check on Darius, Nikki,” he ordered to the girl and, luckily, she was clever enough to obey, leaving them alone and in silence.

Joran finished his glass and poured himself another one. “Astrea, it doesn’t have to be like this. I don’t want to fight you and will not force you to do anything.”

“Anything other than staying forcefully by your side!” She chuckled darkly.

“This is where you will be safe,” he assured her, knowing it wouldn’t make an impression on her. “Over time, you will understand what I am doing and why.”

“I gave up on that a long time ago,” the woman confessed, rubbing her forehead as if she was tired. It was a long day for her. “Eventually, you will see what I did for you and why. You may think I was harsh with you, but everything I did made you the woman you are today. It made you strong! You are the strongest you’ve ever been.”

He finished speaking and waited for her reaction. He needed at least something. Anything.

Astrea folded her arms over her chest, licking her dry lips and making his heart race.

“Thank you for that,” she said in a huskier voice than usual. Relief surged through him. “Now, if you will excuse me, I am tired and would like to retire for the night.”

He nodded and watched her going into the main bedroom. The one that they were sharing tonight.

Joran poured himself another glass and gulped it hastily, unbuttoning the top of his shirt. He knew it would be a while until she fully accepted him, but it would be progress even if he got just to sleep next to her in bed tonight..

He imagined his fingers stroking her delicate skin as she drifted to sleep, teaching her to get used to his presence. His mood improved, and he followed her. It would be a hard night to control his urges next to her, but It still made him excited.

Joran breathed out as he placed his hand on the door handle... only to find it... locked.