

Chapter 56 - The Alpha God's Luna

Astrea's body told her to let go of the horn, but she couldn't let Midnight down, not after the sacrifice he made for her.

She felt dizzy and slightly scared as dark clouds began surrounding her, her fingers prickling as if bolts of electricity were hitting her. It was hard to tell if the darkness enveloping her was real, but she knew one thing... she felt it with her bones — she had to hold the horn as long as she was physically capable. Everything depended on it now.

"I'll call you Midnight," she said, stroking the creature's iridescent mane. "It suits you, and you can keep me company at night when I am working."

The creature looked at her with his wide violet eyes and ticked its wet nose in her chest, eliciting a chuckle from her.

"They told me to create a divine weapon, but you are no weapon! You are gorgeous!" The goddess laughed. "I am going to take good care of you, and you will do the same for me, alright?"

"What kind of nightmare is this?" Her mother gasped, walking into the Moonlight garden in their home, and Astraea smirked in response.

"Nightmare?" she smiled at the black unicorn before her, caressing him more. "He will only be a nightmare to my enemies—"

Astrea desperately sucked in the air as a kaleidoscope of memories flashed before her mind's eye. One of them lingered ever so slightly, and she saw Fenrir standing on a beach next to a huge rock. His hair was much longer than she was used to now, and his eyes locked with hers.

"Stars burn," she told him and marvelled at the stunned expression that painted his face just for a second before he gained composure.

Astrea's lips curled involuntarily, reliving their first-ever meeting.

"Can I kiss you?" Fenrir asked under a glowing willow tree.

"You don't have to ask—" She barely finished the sentence before his lips crashed into hers, mighty hands pressing her delicate body against his.

"You once said stars burn. I will gladly burn forever if I get to be with you." His words rang in her ears.

“Astraea, the Goddess of Stars, the lady of justice, will you do me the honour of a dance?” Fenrir bowed before her, and deities around laughed, not trying to hide their smug expressions and igniting something new inside her. She had never been a rebellious daughter, but that night, she couldn’t ignore injustice.

Her hand touched his, and his whole body shuddered momentarily because he didn’t expect this.

“Don’t tell me you changed your mind, Fenrir—” she teased him and felt his fingers closing around hers.

There were so many memories she could barely breathe. A whole lifetime she couldn’t remember before. Now, Astrea was greedy to get every single piece of the puzzle back and kept holding the horn as if her life depended on it.

“Say that you are mine—” he whispered, his chest rising and falling.

“Are you mine, then?” she taunted, biting her pink lip and sliding her delicate hand up his arm to wrap it around his strong shoulder.

“If you will have me.”

“Are you offering?”

“I am begging, Astraea!” His confession changed everything.

There was so much pain in his eyes that she couldn’t bear it anymore.

“Then it’s a deal. You are mine, and I am yours. Remember that these words are binding, Fenrir.”

A tear rolled down Astrea’s cheek.

She was walking down the beach in Asgard, loyal Midnight by her side. Another wasted day. The Goddess of Stars was back in Asgard after so long, but she couldn’t find a trace of Fenrir, and the date of her wedding was growing closer. Vidar tried to kiss her again earlier today, and she wasn’t sure she’d be able to hold him back for much longer, considering the colours he began to show her.

“I can help you,” Joran walked out from behind the large stone where she had met Fenrir for the first time, startling her.

Instinctively, she felt he was trouble, so she raised her hand, igniting her starry magic at the tips of her fingers as Midnight lowered his head, his horn ready to kill another deity. Waves of cosmic energy made him raise his hands in defence.

“Easy there!” The Serpent let out a chuckle. “I am just trying to help. My name is Jormungandr and I am Fenrir’s—”

“I know who you are.” She dissipated her magic immediately. Fenrir told her about him, so the goddess cut straight to the chase. “Where is he?”

“They — hurt him.” He avoided looking into her eyes.

Her heart ached to hear his words. She suspected it, but knowing this was different. Fenrir didn’t run away like everyone claimed. They tortured him somewhere for what they had done together.

“Where is he?” Her voice was getting louder, and she could feel her power near, almost reaching her this time.

“Listen, it’s dangerous. He wouldn’t want you to risk—” Joran ran his hand through his long blonde hair.

“I asked where he is!” She yelled at him, a warning pulsating in her tone.

“In the sacred mountain — There is a passage. I can take you there, but I tried to get him out many times. It’s useless. You cannot do anything.” Joran finally met her gaze, and she still wasn’t sure if she could trust him, but it wasn’t like she had much choice now.

“We’ll see about that!” Astraea said through clenched teeth. “Lead the way.”

“Fine,” the young dragon nodded and pointed at the nightmare. “You’ll have to leave that behind.”

Astraea bit her lip, considering whether or not that was a good idea. The black unicorn protested, shaking his head and urging her to reconsider.

But Fenrir needed her, so she had to agree.

“There is a Valkyrie who I think can help us,” Joran tried to force a smile on his face, but, at the moment, it seemed too hard for him to do.

“Valkyries serve Odin. Can she be trusted?” Astraea furrowed her brows.

He paused, exhaling heavily and saying, “No one can be trusted. So, are you in?”

She nodded quietly.

“Are you sure about it?” He tested her once more.

“I’ve never been so sure about anything in my life!” the goddess responded. “Take me to Fenrir!”

Astrea had to gasp for air repeatedly as memories were hitting her one after another. There were too many, and her head felt like exploding already, but she didn't want to miss one single thing. This was her past. It belonged to her!

Fenrir in chains... He looked so tired, barely any clothes left on him. They didn't even bother to create any kind of acceptable conditions to keep him here. As if they indeed considered him just an unwanted pet.

She rushed towards him, stepping into puddles on her way.

"Fenrir! What did they do to you?" It was painful to see him like this.

"It's not her, it's not her, it's not her!" He repeated over and over, startling her. She had never been so scared in her life because that muttering was so not like the man she loved.

~

She grasped his chains, trying to remove them —

Until a sword pierced her chest, and she saw the pain in the eyes of her beloved.

Astrea screamed, waking up back in the present, beads of sweat trickling down her spine as she panted.

The nightmare looked at her through hooded eyes; his horn had no effect on her anymore, and he finally allowed himself to fully collapse to the ground.

"Oh, Midnight!" Tears sprayed down her cheeks as Astrea wrapped her arms around her oldest friend. "You knew your poison would not harm me, but help me remember. You always knew that!"

The sounds of the creature's laboured breathing filled the air, but it still let out an approving noise as a reply.

A strong wind blew directly into her face, and she lifted her gaze to see a portal opening right before her and two tall masculine figures walking out of it.

Fenrir saw her first, and his fists clenched at the sight, but the moment their eyes locked, he knew.

He knew that gaze.

She recognised him. Not the one she got to meet in this lifetime.

Him. The real one. The one only she knew.

“Fenrir—” Her voice was barely a whisper, but for him, it moved mountains.

“Astr—” His eyes shifted to what was right behind her. A woman in black leather stood up, getting a charred metal rod from the ground and charging at Astrea.

No! He couldn't let it happen! It was her last lifetime, and he had just found her. He couldn't lose her again.

But before he managed to wield his prime gift of fire and stop the girl, her neck snapped awkwardly before she could reach Astrea.

“How dare you!” Joran gritted his teeth. “A firstborn disobeying my order is a breach that has to be paid with one's life!”

Dominica's body fell to the sand, and the dragon's attention returned to his Dragonfly. Yet she did not look back at him. She did not see him.

In fact, Astrea probably hadn't noticed that she almost got killed by her ex-colleague. Her eyes were on Fenrir only, and Joran knew he officially lost her.

If chances were slim before, now they were completely gone.

“Astraea!” Fenrir rushed towards her, falling to his feet next to her, and she wrapped her arms around him, sobbing.

She didn't say a single word, but her cries told them everything. She cried for what had happened to them, for the things she lost and for what was taken from her over and over. She cried for her love and for finally knowing that not one day passed when he didn't think about her.

Fenrir pressed her against his chest, a rare tear rolling down his cheek. He almost thought this would never happen again. He loved her either way. With each new life, whatever she was like, whatever their story was, he, without a doubt, fell for her. When he promised to stay away, he still loved her, watching her from afar and trying to protect her by means available to him.

But nothing could compare to when she knew who he was. When she remembered their first encounters and their tragic story. Only then were they able to share the pain and happiness of being together at last.

“Fenrir!” she whispered when her little body stopped shuddering from all the crying in his arms. She lifted her face to look at him, and he wiped away her tears with his thumbs.

“I know,” he kissed her forehead gently, lacing his fingers into her hair. “I know — Gods, Astrea, I love you so much! I—”

She wrapped her hands around his neck and pulled him closer, their breaths mingling in a kiss they both had been longing for years. Slow and torturous at first, it quickly turned into something else.

A whirlwind of emotions consumed them until she finally broke it, fear written all over her face.

“Fenrir, Midnight is hurt!” She distanced herself and returned her hands to her oldest friend. “We need to help him!”

“Damn it!” Fenrir swore under his breath and tried to assess the black unicorn’s condition, finding out instantly how bad it was.

“Astrea, he is a part of you. Do you have any of your powers back?” the wolf asked, and she shook her head, biting her lip.

“Only the memories—” she confessed.

“Sh*t,” he muttered. “He is dying.”

“He saved me,” Astrea stroked Midnight to try and reassure him, even though she was aware that the nightmare knew this was his end. “And he helped me to get my memories from my first life back.”

“We can’t save him, I am afraid,” Fenrir told her. “He is your divine weapon, but because he was a living being, it’s different for him. If you got your powers back, you could replenish him, but without them, whatever I have is irrelevant—”

“Make him shed his horn. It can still be used even after his death,” Joran interjected, and Astrea shot him a withering glare.

“Is this what you are worried about now?” Her words were filled with so much venom that it made him flinch.

“He is right!” Fenrir agreed, shocking his beloved.

“I refuse to do it!” she said, holding back another sob that threatened to escape her.

“No, Astrea, you don’t understand,” he placed his hand on top of hers, “we can try to preserve him until you get your powers back.”

She paused, hearing this hope blooming in her chest.

Fenrir took a bead off of his bracelet.

“This one is empty,” he said. “It can hold his spirit while—”

He didn't finish because he could see she was barely holding it together. Too much had happened in one day.

"Do it!" Astrea agreed and cupped Midnight's chest. "My dear friend," she sucked in a deep breath, tears burning her eyes, "trust me one more time, please. This is for the best. I'll do everything to bring you back. I swear—"

Midnight let out a pained sound and closed his eyes, barely able to open them again — a sign of approval.

She wrapped her fingers around his horn once again. At the same time, Fenrir prepared his magical bead, placing his large hand where Midnight's heart was barely beating now.

"I am here with you," Astrea lowered herself to kiss her nightmare's forehead, and as she did, the horn fell into her palm. At the same time, Fenrir concentrated on collecting the last sparks of Midnight's soul. Like little stars, they flew from the creature, dancing in the air before they reached the bead, causing it to glow the same colour Midnight's eyes shone in the past.

Astrea was afraid to distance herself, afraid to move, feeling how heavy the unicorn's head became.

"Until we meet again, my friend," she whispered, unwilling to move. She cried until she couldn't anymore, and Fenrir caressed her back, unwilling to leave her even for a second.

"We'll get him back," he swore. "I promise. We'll get him back."

"We need to go," Joran spoke at last, pain rippling over him as he watched Astrea cradle in Fenrir's arms. It was as if he didn't exist.

"We?" she arched a brow at him, the corners of her lips tilted downwards. "I am not going anywhere with the likes of you!"

"Really?" The dragon furrowed his brows. "After everything I have done for you?"

"Like enslaving me from childhood?" Astrea finally stood up, Fenrir helping her.

"I. Saved. You." Joran said through clenched teeth.

"Bullsh*t!" she threw in his direction, unwilling to spare him another glance.

"You are standing here right now because I managed to hide you from Vidar for so long! You are trained to fight and, more importantly, trained to survive! All thanks to ME!"

"How generous!" she chuckled darkly.

“No, the two of you are the generous ones!” he bellowed. “Not a single thank you for everything I have done! You are literally standing in my home, burned to the ground! By one of you!”

“Then I guess we are even!” Astrea announced and took Fenrir’s hand.

“Let’s go.” He pulled her in the opposite direction, and she followed.

Joran was before them in seconds, standing in their way.

“You’ve got some nerve!” Astrea snarled at him, her eyes glowing with fury. “Mark my words! One day, my powers will return, and I will make you regret everything you did to me and others, too!”

He searched her eyes for remorse or any emotions for him, but she was indifferent to him. This was a promise she intended to keep, and an unfamiliar pain appeared in his chest. It was something new to him. New and heart-breaking.

“I will personally ensure you know the exact pain we suffered thanks to you!” Astrea promised and flinched when he placed his hand on her shoulder. It was as if his touch revolted her whole body, and he couldn’t bear it any longer.

“I know,” Joran breathed out, the ink from her neck slowly returning to where it originally came from — his skin.

Her lips parted when she realised what he was doing as the serpent tattoo finally disappeared from her neck. She touched it when he was done, as if she couldn’t believe he would actually go through with this.

“Thanks for keeping your word, Jor.” Fenrir waved his hand and opened another portal. “I am glad you are still capable of that.”

He had nothing to respond with because he was starting to feel a void forming inside. The familiar sense of emptiness was finally back.

Vidar stood in the empty Alpha Convocation room, observing the city through the wide glass wall and processing the news he had just gotten from his trusted people.

Not everything went perfect, but at least now he finally knew why the divine realm was dying and who was behind it.

This changed his plans drastically as he had to ensure Astraea’s fast return to where she belonged. Not only did he desperately desire to see her by his side, but he also knew he needed her powers to restore what was stolen from the gods. There was no time to play games anymore, as he had to stop the process. No matter what the cost was.

Luckily, he had just the perfect plan...

57. Luna Rising

Chapter 57 - The Alpha God's Luna

Fenrir walked out of the portal with Astrea in his arms, Joran following them into his penthouse, not surprised to find everyone already there. Years had passed, but no one had acquired manners.

“Finally!” Kara ran towards them, eyes on Astrea. “Are you okay? Are you hurt?” Then, she awarded the Serpent with a withering glare, which he ignored. He did not question how and why they were here. Nothing mattered anymore.

“I’ll live,” Astrea replied as a smile curled onto her lips. It was nice to know her new friends were worried about her. Warg and Bash exchanged glances with her and Fenrir, not saying much as usual, but she noticed relief on their faces, which warmed her chest. When she said goodbye to them last time, she wasn’t sure they’d ever see each other again. However, reuniting with these people now made her happy.

“Astrea!” Nikki pushed through the men and got to her mentor, grasping and squeezing her hand so tight she almost broke the bones in her wrist. “I was so worried! Who was it? How—”

“Let her get some rest!” Joran grunted, and the woman froze.

“Your tattoo—” Nikki noticed her empty neck, and Astrea smiled at her.

“I am free now,” she whispered.

Her ward gave her an awkward smile, not knowing if it was appropriate to congratulate her in front of their teacher. Luckily, she was saved by the elevator doors opening, and Forrest, who seemed confused to see this kind of crowd here, walked out.

He did not look lost for long, though, finding the man he came looking for.

“Jordan, what the hell? I couldn’t reach you! Where were you again?” He furrowed his brows, glaring at the Serpent.

“None of your business,” the dragon muttered, but the Southerner grasped his shoulder to make him face his annoyed expression.

“Do you have any idea what is going on lately?” he demanded.

“No, but you are about to tell me!” Joran rolled his eyes, and Forrest exhaled sharply, running his hand through his rich brown hair.

“Vincent wanted to gather the Alpha Convocation while you were gone!” the man announced, expecting a loud reaction that did not follow, stunning him.

Joran felt empty. Just a few hours ago, that would have made him furious. Vidar probably wanted to push his own agenda and ruin his plans, but now — Now all his plans had been already ruined, and he felt so empty inside he could barely shrug his shoulders in response.

“Let him,” he said, and Forrest’s lips parted as he let go of his old frenemy.

“Let him?” The Alpha seethed. “Let him?! Nathair, we are lucky that this Southern clown entered the scene and distracted everyone with the help of the Western royal couple. But I don’t know how long they can go on like this. Not to mention they probably have their own agenda.”

“Devoss?” Fenrir arched a questioning brow, and Bash nodded.

“We have only one man for the job,” his son smirked.

“And the army?”

“Ready when needed on the border,” Bash whispered, but Forrest still heard him.

“I hope you are talking about the Eastern border! And whatever you call an army better stay there!” he warned them, making Fenrir chuckle.

“That would solely depend on the actions of the South,” the King replied.

“Is that a threat?” The Alpha clenched his fists.

“Not at all,” Fenrir shook his head. “It’s a fact that I hope you take into account while making decisions.”

“Enough,” Joran stepped between them. “Believe me or not, but you two are not the problem here. Only Vi—Vincent is. So why don’t we go there and listen to what he has to say?”

They quietly agreed.

“Astrea, go and get some rest. I’ll be back as soon as I can,” Fenrir turned his attention to the woman next to him, and she was slightly disappointed they were separating so soon after their reunion. But she knew him. Now she really knew him and was aware that he wouldn’t leave her if it wasn’t absolutely necessary.

So, she nodded and watched the men walk out of the room, leaving her alone with Nikki and Bjorn.

The white bear shifter stood right by the window again. As if he could see what was outside.

“Come.” Nikki touched her gently and smiled. “I will help you take a bath. You are hurt.”

“It’s fine.” She shrugged, not knowing what that feeling inside her was. Something was off, something important.

They were almost to her bedroom when she heard that damn bear saying.

“Free my a.ss.”

She froze, and Nikki glared at the man on her behalf.

“Don’t be mean,” her ward hissed, fingers clenching tighter around her. They were always this defensive of each other.

“How is stating the facts mean?” He didn’t turn to them. “She said she was free, yet she had just taken an order without so much as questioning it.”

“He wasn’t exactly — ordering,” Nikki argued, and Astrea realised what that odd feeling inside her was.

She was furious.

Furious to get left behind.

Her Firstborn upbringing taught her not to question such things, not to take the lead. She rebelled against that, of course, but only in extreme situations. And right now, she was confident Fenrir could handle everything without her.

But it was Vidar who was waiting for him in that Alpha Convocation conference hall right now. It was Vidar who was clearly plotting against them.

Vidar was the current ruler of Asgard, and he was the man who broke them apart time after time. She had to be there. She had to oppose him, and she had to fight him with all she had.

She had to be a part of this.

“He is right,” she said, and her ward knitted her brows together.

“Don’t listen to him!” she said through clenched teeth. “He is just being an a.ss.hole.”

Astrea glanced at herself in the decorative mirror on the wall. Her dress was dirty and torn, her hair a mess, and dried blood was where she had wounds before. She really needed that bath.

“Excuse me!” She straightened her back. “There is an urgent matter to attend to!”

She sauntered into the elevator and pressed the button.

“See what you have done?” Nikki snarled and bit her lips when she realised what she said.

A little smile curled on Bjorn’s lips, as he did not comment on that.

The elevator doors opened, and Astrea rushed inside, leaving them alone.

“Sometimes we need to hear what we do not want to,” Bjorn added and finally turned towards where he thought Nikki stood. “I learned that lesson the hard way.”

“What the hell is she going to do there?” the Firstborn sighed, finding herself already close to him.

“Nikiah,” Bjorn stretched his hand, searching for her face, and she let him find it, blush tinting her cheeks. “Your friend is the key to everything. Don’t you get it?”

“In my humble opinion, the further she is away from all that, the better.” Nikki hummed sarcastically and felt his thumb stroking her cheek.

“That’s something I want for you,” he confessed. “Freedom, far away from this place and these people. It’s the only way for you to stay safe.”

She was stunned by his words.

“You know it’s not going to happen, Darius.” She lowered her eyes and was happy he couldn’t see how ashamed she was right now by her response. Unfortunately, she knew too well how dangerous conversations like these were.

“On the contrary.” Bjorn shook his head. “I think it’s happening this very moment.”

Warg pushed the doors open for them. Fenrir, Joran and Forrest walked inside the Alpha Convocation conference room, a strong Eastern fragrance hitting their nostrils at once.

Everyone important in the South was present, and two special seats were prepared for King Gideon and Queen Riannon, who eyed the newcomers curiously.

Devoss stood in the centre of the room with a thin metal stick in one hand and what looked like a brass lid in the other.

“Ah, more guests for the incense ceremony!” he grinned at them, and Fenrir noted how annoyed almost every single Alpha in the room was. That sly fox knew how to evoke this emotion in people.

“How long—” someone tried to ask, but Devoss was next to him in seconds.

“Shh,” he touched his lips and shook his head like a teacher scolding his naughty student. “We don’t talk during the incense ceremony. Unless you guess what incense is burned. But we have burned none yet, right?”

With these words, he hit the metal stick over the lid, creating a bell-like sound with the most serious expression.

“This is a vital tradition in our Eastern Kingdom. No important meeting is done without it.”

Lie.

“If you break the ritual, misfortunes will follow everyone involved, and according to our laws, we have to kill the one at fault to prevent this from happening.”

Another lie.

It worked, though, because after the fire show they pulled, no one wanted to provoke them.

Fenrir took a seat at the head of the table, ignoring the one next to Gideon and Riannon, clearly designated for him.

“This seat is meant for the High Chancellor,” a female Alpha in her fifties whispered to him.

“Well, you don’t have one yet, do you?” He raised a brow at her. “In the East, we give the best seat to the guests.”

“This is—” One of the older Alphas wanted to protest, but Devoss was next to him in the blink of an eye, hitting the stick over the lid again right next to his ear, creating another loud sound. A pure torture for any shifter, considering their hearing.

“So,” the fox could finally speed up the process. “We levelled the ash and used the seal for the incense. Now, all that is left is to light up its edge. All I need is to get some fire and—”

Fenrir clicked his fingers, and the powder sparkled, starting the burning process and helping him to remind everyone in the room what kind of power he held. They would have to listen to him.

Devoss closed the little incense burner, watching a thin stream of smoke rise to the ceiling.

“At the end of the ceremony, guess the scent,” he grinned at his exhausted audience.

“Cherry blossom and white sage.” Astrea’s voice made all eyes dart in her direction as she stood before them in her destroyed dress. “Excuse me, ladies and gentlemen. I am late.”

“Dear, are you all right?” One female Alpha asked, eyes assessing her look.

“It was a long night!” Astrea shrugged and raised her chin.

“You can’t be here,” a man with silver hair rolled his eyes. “This is the Alpha Convocation, for crying out loud! We let the Kings and the Queen in, but you—”

“She is here as a Luna,” Riannon Stormhold tried to suppress a smile, but for the first time ever, she was failing. Her husband laced his fingers with hers, watching the show.

“Nathair,” one of the men glared at Joran, who had already taken his usual seat. “How about you tell your fiancée to wait outside with the other Lunas—”

Fenrir cleared his throat loudly and smirked.

“She is here as my Luna.”

While everyone else in the room was in awe, he stood up and offered her his chair. “I warmed it up for you, my love.”

Astrea walked towards him, finally feeling like she was in the right place.

Joran and Vidar traced each movement with their eyes.

She sat down, and Fenrir remained standing next to her, his hand resting on her bare shoulder.

“The dress from last night, all in blood and with a new Alpha by her side?” one of the younger men scoffed. “It was a long night indeed!”

A group of Alphas next to him exchanged knowing smiles.

Warg growled loudly, making them all flinch.

“Excuse my friend,” Devoss sneered at the offenders. “In the East, remarks like this get people killed. But we will try to restrain him.”

He punctuated the word try.

“Okay, I think it’s safe to say we are done with introductions.” Vidar took the word, not sparing another glance at Astrea. “Obviously, we have guests here today, and maybe they will share their perspective on the situation we found ourselves in. The South has nothing to hide. We are a very transparent nation.”

Fenrir did not like how confident that prick was.

“And what is this situation again?” Forrest asked, tapping his fingers over the cold surface of the long table.

“The Northern army is on our border,” Vidar announced, making everyone gasp. “I just received a report an hour ago.”

Gasps, whispers and growls filled the room as a wave of first reactions rippled through it. Astrea stiffened in her seat. Knowing King Kai and Queen Savannah, that didn't sound right.

"Moreover," Vidar continued. "They say they are led by a witch from the East."

Once again, all eyes were on them.

58. Found

Chapter 58 - The Alpha God's Luna

"What exactly are you implying here?" King Gideon furrowed his dark brows while his wife gently drew circles on the back of his palm with her thumb. "You know Queen Savannah of the Northern Lycan Kingdom is my sister! Neither she nor her husband would ever attack a neighbouring country! This goes against everything they believe in!"

"Or maybe you don't know them that well anymore?" Vidar smirked, folding his arms over his chest as every Alpha in the room watched him.

"Or maybe your lack of political experience shows," Riannon pointed out calmly and met the deity's stern gaze with a little smile. "We all know your story. Your father didn't train you well, did he? You aren't exactly prepared to deal with matters like this, so maybe it's best you sit this one out? This isn't similar to ruling a small pack, but I think by watching, you will get the necessary experience for your future endeavours."

Joran snorted loudly, finding the conversation amusing, and all eyes in the room darted at him. This wasn't his usual behaviour, but he did not care anymore, so he just leaned against the back of his seat to get a better view of the show.

"Right," Forrest cleared his throat, trying to distract everyone. "Right now, it's all simple speculation. We are not at war with them, and there is no reason for them to attack us."

"The reason is sitting right there!" Vidar pointed his index finger at Fenrir. "Or is it a coincidence that it all happened during your spectacular arrival and that it's the witch from the East that leads them?"

"What is the name of the witch?" Astrea asked innocently, and Vidar sent her a withering glare, which she pretended not to notice. He always wanted her to be his silent accessory, and she wasn't going to give him that.

"Salome Gray," one of the older men read the report before him.

"Then why do you say she is an Eastern witch?" Astrea knitted her brows together. "Salome Gray was not born in the East. Moreover, she was banished from the Eastern Kingdom. I think

you need to get your facts straight before accusing anyone. I honestly thought the Southern Republic had better intel than that.”

“Are you implying the North is the only one at fault?” someone demanded.

“My Luna is not implying anything,” Fenrir interferred. “She just tells the truth. Salome left our country, and although it is quite possible she's now working in the North because she's a very talented witch, I highly doubt that she is leading their army. Not to mention that I don't believe the North is about to attack.”

“Then how would you explain an army on our border?” another Alpha asked.

“Actually, I am afraid this can be my fault indeed,” Fenrir shrugged. “My — arrival was a bit — let's say flashy. Maybe they got worried I would attack them next and just prepare to defend themselves if the need arises.”

Vidar did not like that response because it did make sense and was ruining the narrative he weaved so carefully.

“The bottom line is they didn't attack,” Forrest interjected. “And we are not going to attack first, considering our values. So, in my opinion, as the acting general and member of the Alpha Convocation, we should seek comments on what is going on from the Northerners and assess the threat level, but at the same time our army mobilisation is a must.”

A few men in the room nodded.

“Any comments, Nathair?” An older woman asked, and the dragon lazily shifted his gaze to her.

“I think Forrest pretty much got it under control. Are we done here?” The man in question stretched his neck.

The silence in the room became heavy.

“Unless we are going to discuss our military strategy in front of strangers, of course.” Joran stood up. “We heard what they have to say. We know what we have to do. Forrest is our acting chief general. This is the end of the story for me until we know what the North has to say about it.”

He left the room before anyone could say anything else.

“We will give the Alpha Convocation the privacy it needs.” Gideon stood up as well and offered his wife a hand. His Queen accepted it with a subtle smile, and they were about to leave when Astrea gave a quick signal to Fenrir that she was going to follow them.

“Queen Riannon, I would like to have a minute of your time, if possible,” she said, suddenly remembering how she looked. Maybe she had to let it go and take that shower first.

Soft, silky fabric touched her shoulders, and she angled her head to see Devoss bowing his head to her. “My Luna.”

The bright purple blazer wasn’t exactly her style, but it did feel nice to be cared for and respected. Fenrir gave his friend a thankful gaze. He only had a shirt on and had nothing to offer Astrea at this moment, so his friend’s gesture was appreciated.

“Thank you,” the Dragonfly nodded politely and turned back to look at the western royal couple.

“It would be my honour, Luna,” Ria nodded subtly as Gideon opened the door for them both. “I wanted to speak to you too.”

Outside, Gideon kissed his wife’s hand.

“I have an urgent matter to attend to,” he said and nodded at Astrea. “I hope to see you again soon, Luna of The East.”

“Me too,” the girl replied nervously.

The Western King was gone and the two women took a stroll down the long corridors of the building, searching for a quiet place to speak. Finally, they saw a passage that led them to a hidden gem of the building — a spacious balcony with the city sprawling below. Green plants adorned it on all sides, creating a relaxing atmosphere.

Taking a deep breath of fresh air, Astrea felt a little better and slightly more confident about what she was going to do.

Her memories were back, as in the memories of her first life ever.

However, at the same time, she started to see glimpses of her childhood in this lifetime. They were mere fleeting moments, but each one resonated in her heart. Sometimes it was the memory of bare feet on the grass; sometimes it was children’s laughter. She saw wolves running and distinctly remembered hugging one. She remembered how soft it was and what a wonderful scent it had. Still, it was hard to tell what she saw.

Until she remembered a woman. Her shiny blond hair cascaded to her waist, her warm smile and eyes that looked through her soul. It wasn’t the Queen of the Western Lycan Kingdom. Astrea was sure of it, but the woman she saw resembled Riannon a lot. Same features, same elegance. It couldn’t be a coincidence.

They stood on this balcony for a while, and none of them said a word.

Astrea didn’t know why it was so hard for her. She wasn’t usually the shy type.

“So, what did you want to talk about?” Riannon asked, leaning over the rails and touching one of the green leaves with her long fingers.

“I—” Once again, Astrea lost her words. “I wanted to make sure you are fine. And to thank you for not holding what I did against me.”

“You saved us all.” The corners of Ria’s lips tilted upwards. “I have to thank you. None of us would have survived if you hadn’t betrayed your Teacher.”

Astrea tried to form her question, but the words were not reaching her tongue. What if she was wrong about it?

“You know,” Riannon sighed, “family is the most important thing in the world for me.”

“I can tell that,” Astrea nodded.

“Maybe it’s because prior to meeting Gideon, I had lost everyone I loved,” Ria confessed, and her voice trembled.

“Your parents?” Something in the Dragonfly’s chest stirred. She hoped at least someone was still alive.

“Died right after my marriage. My first marriage.” Tears glistened in the Western Queen’s eyes. “This wasn’t the first time I lost someone. When I was still a teen, my brother and two twin sisters were killed in a rogue attack.”

“Wh-what were their names?” It suddenly became much harder to breathe, and she clenched the rails so hard that the metal bent under her grip.

“Brian,” Riannon’s voice was barely a whisper, “Stella and—”

The woman turned to face her, tears now streaming freely down her beautiful, perfect face.

“And Astrea.” Ria took her hand and gave it a light squeeze.

“You know,” the Dragonfly muttered under her breath. “How long have you known?”

“For a while,” the Western Queen tried to force a smile, but it wasn’t working. “I knew after I woke up in that Northern Hall. I knew who you were and what sacrifice you made for us all. I wanted to go look for you as soon as the battles were over, but—”

“But she sold you out to me!” Joran leaned over the balcony frame with a bottle of whiskey in his hand, taking a long sip as the two startled women watched him.

“I am pretty sure that’s a lie!” Astrea gritted her teeth, lacing her fingers with Ria’s to reassure her, but noticing how she lowered her head.

“I did not want to—” Her older sister was fighting a sob that threatened to escape her. “He—”

“Come on!” Joran chuckled coldly, enjoying the moment. “I didn’t even have to torture her. The whole thing took me like a minute or two. She sold you out because she did not care about you. The only person who really cared about you is me!”

“Is that so?” Astrea snapped her head in his direction. “Is that what you caring about me looks like?”

He frowned, taking another gulp of the liquid that failed to burn his throat the way he wanted it to. He wished for it to burn away all the pain from his chest, but it wasn’t working. She still couldn’t see what he saw.

“It’s true,” Riannon admitted. “I don’t want there to be lies between us, Astrea. He asked me about your location and I told him. Maybe if I didn’t, you could have escaped to the East and be safe there with Fenrir.”

“Or maybe he would have found me anyway,” the girl shook her head. “He is a god and a freaking dragon! It was naïve to think I could escape that easily.”

“It’s still my fault—” Riannon exhaled painfully, and Joran let out a bitter laugh.

“Let me guess,” his Dragonfly gave him a contemptuous glance, “you were pregnant, and he threatened to hurt your child?”

“And she chose the brat that wasn’t even born yet!” he “reasoned” and she rolled her eyes at him.

“As she should! This is her child and my nephew! I would have been appalled if she chose otherwise! But that’s something you wouldn’t understand!”

“If she really loved you—” The dragon got angrier and threw the whiskey bottle against the wall right next to Riannon, myriads of shards flying in all directions, cutting the Western Queen’s skin in several places.

Ria hissed in pain, and Astrea was next to her in seconds.

“Are you out of your mind?” she yelled at the god before her and then concentrated on her sister. “Are you okay?”

“I am fine,” Riannon cupped her cheek and smiled through tears. “It’s just a scratch, and I am already regenerating. And to be honest, nothing can ruin this day for me. Not when I finally found you, Asti.”

The word sent a rush of goosebumps down her spine, evoking more childhood memories that were now flooding her mind.

Astrea took off the blazer Devoss gave her and tried to use the fabric to soak the blood from her sister's wounds, while the latter assured her she was fine.

"Ria, we will talk again soon!" Astrea pulled her into a tight hug and whispered into her ear. "Right now, I need you to find Gideon. Take him and leave back to the West. It's not safe here at the moment and you have a kid to worry about."

"I am not leaving you!" Riannon embraced her back. "Not again!"

"You are not leaving me," the Dragonfly smiled. "You are helping me and Fenrir do what is right. In the meantime, you need to take care of your country and your people. You know that."

The Queen of the West pursed her lips. It wasn't what she wanted to hear or how they wished for this conversation to go, but they both knew that at this given moment in time, it was the best course of action.

"Just know that me, Gideon and the West are always with you," Riannon gave her one last hug. "Whatever you need. Any time."

"I know," Astrea smiled and embraced her tighter. "Go, Ria. We will catch up another time."

Riannon was about to leave, when she stopped right next to Joran.

"Remember what I told you," she said through clenched teeth. "I don't even have to do anything. Your end has already been written!"

"Bye, witch!" he ignored her and stepped onto the balcony, crushing the glass under his boots.

He waited for the sounds of receding steps to disappear before he spoke up again.

"Is it finally my turn?"

"What do you want?" The woman snapped, throwing the blazer over the rail and meeting his gaze.

"Really, Astrea? Is that all you have to tell me after everything?" He ran his hand through his blonde hair.

"I just know you better," she retorted. "You always want something."

"I saved you!" he bellowed.

"And turned me into your slave! You are sad now because I am not wearing my collar anymore. Or am I wrong?"

“Everything I did was for your protection,” he threw his head back, trying not to look at her because it was too painful for his liking.

“You know it’s a lie just as well as I do.” Astrea shook her head. “Get over it.”

She turned on her heels to leave, but he caught her arm, fingers digging into her flesh.

“Why?” A fire she hadn’t seen before burned in his eyes. “Why, after all these years, you couldn’t fall for me?”

59. First Time Offer

Chapter 59 - The Alpha God's Luna

Joran held her tight, and she glared at him so fiercely that his heart clenched painfully. He did not even realise before that moment how much she meant to him and how much she hated him.

Not like that.

“Why?” He repeated. “Why couldn’t you fall for me? I was always there, doing everything for you!”

Astrea stared at him for a few minutes, shocked he had to ask her that.

“Because I was already taken!” She replied, making him flinch at her words. “Because I never saw you that way. You never acted like a man who knew how to love, a man with whom I could feel safe, and to be absolutely honest, I still think you don’t know what actual love is.”

Those words were like a slap to him, and his first instinct was to pull her closer.

“I have lived for thousands of years. Do you think I have never been in love before? I know very well what love is!”

“You had women in your life, no doubt there,” Astrea tilted her head, meeting his gaze. “But would you sacrifice yourself for any of them? You are an immortal, and where are all those women now?”

His fingers unclenched, letting her go, and she straightened her dress, distancing herself as far as the balcony would allow it.

“I cared for you. I cherished you. I didn’t push you. Don’t think for one second I couldn’t have done whatever the hell I wanted to you.” The bitter words left him while the pain was still spreading through his chest.

“You don’t get a medal for not forcing me,” she cut him off and turned away. “It’s not how it works, Joran.”

Joran wanted to spin her around so that she faced him again and yell at her, but something told him it would only make matters worse, so he stormed out of the balcony to find more alcohol. It was annoying how much fiery liquid was required to make him stop feeling anything. Sometimes his divine status seemed like a curse.

He bumped into someone at the end of the corridor and swore under his breath.

“Don’t stop on my account.” The God of Vengeance measured him from head to toe with his gaze. “It’s not like we have anything to talk about.”

“What, no deals then?” Joran let out a dark chuckle.

“No deals for you, that is.” Vidar’s lips curled into a merciless smile. “I don’t think I need you anymore. Someone else took advantage of my offer, and they will reap the benefits.”

“Some benefits!” Joran scoffed, rolling his eyes. “To be locked away as your subject in Asgard forever?”

“Nothing you will have to worry about anymore.” Vidar kept walking, demonstrating that he was done with this conversation.

Joran was happy to get rid of him, and although initially, he wanted to be left alone, his legs somehow brought him back somewhere else while he processed what he had just heard.

He saw his brother talking to his team next to the Convocation Hall.

“May I have a word?” He interrupted them, and Fenrir raised a brow questioningly but still followed him to an empty corner of the grand corridor.

“I thought I wouldn’t see you for another century or two,” the wolf chuckled. “What do you want?”

“I just spoke to Vidar,” Joran cut straight to the chase, frowning. “And I think one of your inner circle has betrayed you.”

Astrea took a gulp of the evening air, trying to calm herself down after the nightmare of a conversation with her ex-teacher when warm fingers touched the bare skin on her shoulders.

Vidar knew what kind of effect his touch would have on her as goosebumps rippled over both their bodies, awakening their mate bond whether she wanted it. Any physical contact between them always promised so much pleasure...

“Don’t do that,” she shivered, hoping he would take his hands away, but his fingers only pressed harder into her flesh.

“I wish I could,” he breathed out.

“A sorry excuse!” Astrea shook her head with a sigh.

“I have been waiting for you for so long. The wait almost killed me, and I don’t know if I can do it anymore. Don’t you see I am the only one who can make you happy? The only one who truly cares about you?”

“And how many times in the past did I hear that speech?” She turned to face him, staring him straight in the eye.

The corners of his lips twisted into a smirk.

“I see your memories are back!” Vidar leaned lower and captured her lips before she could do anything about it, startling her and pressing her against the balcony. His fingers dug into her hair, making it impossible to distance herself even though she tried to wriggle away from him.

Tingles erupted, making his breathing ragged. Even a god had his limits. That woman was driving him crazy from the first moment he saw her. Moreover, she belonged to him. She was given to him and tied with a forever kind of bond. He was only taking what was rightfully his, which was why her slap stung like no other.

Astrea glared at him as he rubbed his cheek, tasting the bitter rejection once again.

“How long are you going to fight this?” he sneered, changing his tone to a much colder one. “You know it’s true as much as I do.”

“What is true?” She shook her head.

“That you can fight me as long as you want, but it will change nothing. You are mine, and it’s not a coincidence that even after all this time, I am the only one who can save you now. The universe is trying to restore everything to where it belongs.”

“Save me?” She huffed, pushing him against the wall before he could realise it and pressing a cold blade to his neck, shocking him. She clearly had never been an assassin before in her previous lives. “Who says I need saving at all? What does saving me even mean to you?” Astrea wrinkled her forehead. “You are the one I need saving from! So I guess I have to save myself.”

“Easy there,” Vidar raised his eyes to demonstrate he was giving up. “It’s not like anyone but me has divinity to spare to save your soul from perishing.”

She did her best not to let her lips flinch, holding his gaze.

“Oh, your hero did not tell you, did he?” A smug smile stretched over the god of Vengeance’s face. “Last lifetime, deary. You have no more lives to spare on your little tantrum.”

“Little tantrum?” A laugh escaped her as she released him. A simple knife wouldn’t kill him, anyway. Who was she kidding? “Is that how you are calling millennia of my defiance?”

“What’s a few thousand years for gods?” Vidar’s eyes glowed red, and she clenched her fingers around the hilt of her dagger, thanking herself for taking it from the sand on the Firstborn island when she had a chance and regretting leaving Midnight’s horn with Fenrir instead. That could have been scarier for this prick.

“We have an eternity to spend together,” Vidar continued, regardless of their position. “Let’s stop playing these games, Astraea. Come with me, and I’ll make you the Queen and Goddess you were always supposed to be.”

“No, thank you.” She shook her head. “Even if it’s my last life — Especially if it’s my last life — I want to spend it with Fenrir. Our mate bond is just a mista—”

“It can be a much shorter lifetime than you think!” Vidar gritted his teeth. “Why do you think I am here?”

“To cut my life short because I dared to say no? Again,” she suggested, playing with her blade.

“I found the problem, Astraea. I know why gods are still dying.”

The announcement made her pause in her tracks. It all happened so long ago, but the pain in her chest was so real. She had lost so much. All her divine sisters died, her aunts and uncles, cousins... The gods were dying like flies. As if their divinity meant nothing and no one could stop that process.

“Finally, I got to the real you.” Vidar tilted his head to look at her. “The one who has the responsibility to save her kind on her shoulders.”

“What’s causing the divine realm to crumble?” she asked bluntly, wishing to stop the game they were playing.

He smirked, walking back to the balcony rail and waving his arm around the city landscape lit by the setting sun.

“This,” he said.

“The southern capital?” She really hoped that was it, but his chuckle proved her worst suspicions.

“No, Astraea, no, it’s not the capital. It’s all of it. The whole mortal realm!” he announced, as if mocking her. “All this time, we were thinking about why we were growing weaker and why it

became possible to kill us. Well, now we know! It's the vermin under our feet sucking the life out of our realm! The one we took pity on and cared for almost caused our demise."

Astrea swallowed uncomfortably.

"What are you going to do?"

"I'll tell you what I am not going to do." Vidar straightened his back. "I will not let the mortals feed from our divine power anymore. This has to end."

"What do you mean?" Every muscle in Astrea's body went rigid as her heart palpitated with a sense of impending dread. "There is a balance to be kept—"

"You are the one to talk about balance!" A laugh rumbled through his chest. Not a warm and joyous one. When Vidar laughed, she felt colder and lonelier than ever before. "Your two boyfriends went on a spree, blessing armies and rewarding them with gifts just because they could! How do you think that affected the so-called balance?"

"It can be evened out over time." She hugged her shoulders, not liking where this conversation was going.

"I am afraid I don't want to wait and see," the ruler of New Asgard exhaled heavily. "I am not risking the divine realm for — this."

"What are you planning to do?" she whispered, knowing the answer.

"If this world is a problem for us, then I will have to erase it," he responded calmly, as if it wasn't a big deal.

"You are going to destroy this world?" Astrea was barely able to form the words. "This is madness!"

He turned on his heels to face her again. "This brings me back to our original topic of discussion, Astraea. Join me and avoid all this. Live in luxury, feel the power that was always supposed to be yours. You need divinity to become a goddess again, and I have plenty after the fall of my brothers and sisters. You will need nothing. And as a special courtesy to you, I will postpone destroying this realm for another century. So that the people you care about can live their lives as planned. One century, though, no more and no less."

"Have these threats worked before?" She folded her arms over her chest, coming to her senses after the initial shock of the revelations.

"It's the first time I am offering," Vidar admitted. "And the clock is ticking, Astraea. Each extra hour you think takes a year away from my offer."

The God of Vengeance assessed her once again, his eyes roaming her frame as if he had already won.

“I will wait for your decision,” he passed her and paused near the door. “But not too long. I am still getting everything I want. The question is, what are you getting out of it?”

He left her standing there, angry and lost. And scared.

No matter how she looked at it, this conversation did not go well. If Vidar wanted to destroy this realm, could he really do it?

60. Let Them Listen

Chapter 60 - The Alpha God's Luna

“There you are,” Fenrir’s voice brought her back, and her heart skipped a beat when she saw him standing in the doorway, watching her with that gaze of his that made her forget about everything.

He didn’t say anything else, clenching and unclenching his fists a few times, and she realised he didn’t know what to say. It was the first time they were finally alone and the first time she remembered who he was to her.

Now, she looked at him differently, noticing the changes the years that passed had made on him. Now she knew how he got the scars on his face and body. She noticed a few new wrinkles here and there, but most of all, she couldn’t ignore the longing in his eyes.

“Here I am.” She tried to curl her lips, but her smile faltered.

Too long. It’s been too long since they were able to be together, touch each other... It didn’t feel like centuries, it felt like forever.

Astrea did not remember her other lives, but right now, even though she had been with him just a few days ago, it seemed like he hadn’t touched her in years.

She needed him like air. Needed to feel him, to belong to him, and from the flames burning in his eyes, she could tell he felt the same way.

Just this once. This once, she would be selfish and let them forget the world outside this balcony existed. They could save everyone later. Together. Not now...

She did not have to tell him a word because they both were clearly thinking the same thing as their bodies magnetically pulled towards each other — lips crashing, breathing mingled, hands grasping.

Fenrir pinned her against the wall in one swift move, his hot tongue descending on her delicate neck that was finally free from another man's mark.

A whimper left her mouth because it felt so good. Her so-called mate touched her just a few minutes ago, but the primal physical reaction she had to Fenrir's caresses couldn't be compared to anything. This was the man she loved, the one whose touch she craved.

Tonight, they would reign in their desires.

And they would enjoy it.

She wrapped her arms around his neck, ripping off the top button of his shirt. A long scar ran up from his chest and she traced it with her tongue, eliciting a growl of approval from him. His erection was pressing onto her stomach, and she slid her hands to unbuckle his pants.

This was probably the worst place to do this, but they couldn't postpone this even for a second.

Not to mention, they were used to expressing their love in the worst places.

Fenrir lifted her up and placed her on top of the balcony rail, securing her with just one hand as if she weighed nothing. It was one of the top floors, and she felt gravity pulling her down, yet at the same time, she knew that with this man, she was safe.

He dipped his head at the crook of her neck, brushing off the fabric of her dress and draping her leg around his waist as she reached for his hard c*ck and wrapped her fingers around it, stroking it in torturous moves that made him snarl into her.

"You are mine," he stated. Not asked.

"Always and forever," she confirmed, feeling his hand pulling her lacy thong aside, two fingers probing her wetness, followed by a growl of approval. She clenched his shaft tighter, guiding it to her entrance as Fenrir slipped the fabric of her dress down to reveal her breast and almost instantly sucked on one of her nipples, making it hard.

She arched her back for him, wanting to feel him more. Everywhere. All the time.

Anyone could walk in here. Anyone could see them if they knew where to look.

Yet none of them cared as he thrust into her, filling her and making her feel whole again.

"Damn it, Astrea," he groaned against her as he started moving. Those were not gentle caresses anymore. Raw primal need overwhelmed them both as he withdrew and slammed back into her to the hilt, watching her breasts echo his movement, only arousing him more.

She was divine. Radiating desire as he watched her beautiful body spread for him against the canvas of the city below. So gorgeous and all his.

Only one thing in the entire world was ever his, but it was the one he couldn't live without.

Her fingers dug into his flesh, not to hold herself. She knew he took care of that. This was the only way she could express the pleasure she was getting from him now.

He shoved into her roughly again, watching her scream as the wind whipped her silvery-white hair. Again and again, he pounded into her with all his might, and she moaned his name just the way he liked it.

He was unleashed. After years and years of waiting, he could finally have her again.

“More!” she begged. “Don't stop!”

“Not — going to!” he groaned, grasping her a.ss to bring her even closer to him. “All mine!”

Beads of sweat formed on both their bodies as she screamed her release, not caring if the whole world heard them.

Let them listen.

Fenrir watched her, not being able to stop and letting her ride her cl.imax before he finally tipped over the edge and came into her, his seed overflowing as he desperately tried to seal it deeper within her.

Until he finally stopped, the world around them spinning as he held her in his arms as if she was the most precious thing.

She wrapped her arms around his neck, her face pressed against his chest, and tears silently falling from her eyes.

“I love you,” she whispered to him.

“I love you too,” he placed a kiss on the top of her head, knowing what she was going through now. The mix of happiness and pain was their constant companion.

“We lost so much time!” she said, not able to look at him.

“I know.” He sighed, covering her from the cruel reality in his enormous arms. “But I'd do it all over again, even for a fleeting moment of love with you.”

A chuckle escaped her, which turned into a sob.

They lost so much.

They still could lose each other again.

“Vidar wants to destroy this realm.” The words left her against her will. She did not want to talk about this. Not really. She wanted to enjoy her moment with the love of her life.

But she couldn’t be selfish anylonger. He had to know this.

“Whatever for?” Fenrir furrowed his brows and looked at her, searching her face for answers.

“He thinks this realm is the reason the gods are dying,” she told him the truth. “And he believes you and Joran are to blame for this because you blessed too many mortals.”

“Gods were dying long before that.” He sighed and pulled her dress back up to cover her breast, throwing his head back not to look at her still hard nipples.

“I know!” she agreed with him as he gently took her off the railing. “But he insists this realm ruins the balance. He wants to destroy it to strengthen the divine one.”

“He is — something!” Fenrir growled. “Someone was killing off the gods. Some power. It’s not like they were dying from sickness. There is something else.”

“Do you know what?” she glanced at him, and he brushed his fingers through her silky hair simply because he couldn’t help himself.

“I met them just once. Long time ago,” he said. “They call themselves Hunters.”

“Who are they?” she asked.

“Who knows?” Fenrir shook his head. “They wanted to kill the gods, and I had nothing against it. Maybe that was why they left me alone. But it was so many centuries ago — Now I wish I knew more.”

“Maybe if we tell this to Vidar—”

“That prick would never listen,” the wolf exhaled heavily. “Besides, he may have a point. Blessing a champion takes away from the divine source. Despite being banished from Asgard and not able to enter it, we are still both connected to the source by blood. When we blessed all those mortals, it definitely took its toll.”

“Still, we can’t let him do that!” She looked up at him with her beautiful starry eyes, the whole universe trapped in them.

“We won’t,” Fenrir pulled her closer. “He has to be dealt with, anyway. I can’t stand him anywhere near you, and you still need a divinity, which, trust me, I am getting you.”

She knew he meant it, and her lips curled into a smile as she allowed herself to close her eyes and enjoy this moment with him.

“Mark me,” she whispered, making him flinch.

Fenrir stopped and distanced her slightly from him, so that he could see her face and the determination written all over it.

“Are you — sure?” he asked, his voice so different from his usual tone.

The question stung her a bit. Did he really have to ask?

“It’s just—” the wolf cleared his throat, “we are gods, and gods don’t mark each other that way. Technically—”

Astrea cupped his cheek gently, making him lock his eyes with hers.

“I love you more than life,” she smiled at him through tears forming in her eyes, “I loved you in every lifetime, every scenario, every time we met. I loved you when the whole universe was against us, and every power that ever existed wished to tear us apart. I will love you whether this world stands or perishes into oblivion. Through the chaos and destruction, I always hold on to you, and you never disappoint. So, yes, Fenrir, I really want it. I want to bear your mark wherever you are willing to place it, because I want everyone to see who I belong to. Because it was my choice!”

He sucked in a sharp breath and wanted to reply, but her soft fingers touched his lips. She wasn’t done yet.

“And I want to mark you too. Would you let me?”

She bit her lip, waiting for his reply, and Fenrir brushed his palm over her cheek, the last golden rays of the setting sun drawing their features, almost making them feel ethereal.

“You can do anything to me, Astrea.”

Any other god would have been afraid to even pronounce such words because of their binding effect. But not Fenrir. And not with her.

It was a confession in itself, and she stood on the tips of her toes to try to reach his lips. He met her halfway, claiming what was rightfully his.

The kiss was quickly growing into something else again.

“We need to find a better place to continue this,” he growled into her mouth as she giggled, agreeing with him.

Sudden light blinded them, and a deafening sound followed. The world around them seemed to shake and an unexpected wave of heat washed over them, carrying with it the acrid scent of smoke and burning debris.

Fenrir locked her in his arms, trying to protect her from whatever it was, but she still pushed away a little to be able to see what was going on.

The air filled with the sounds of sirens blaring, mingling with the distant cries of people below as an enormous stomp of fire was dying down in the centre of this sovereign capital.

The flickering flames danced in the sky, casting an eerie glow over the city. It became almost impossible to breathe from all the dust and the heat.

“Explosion,” Astrea gasped. “But how — who?”

They looked at each other, concern and realisation painting their faces. The weight of uncertainty and fear settled upon them, causing both their hearts to race.

“Those people—” she whispered. “This is terrible!”

She looked at Fenrir, trying to find some consolation in him, but only saw the wrinkle between his eyes deepen as he loudly swore under his breath.

“F*ck! We are royally scr*wed!” he grunted, his grip on her tightening.

She followed his gaze, and her lips parted in shock as she watched a huge blue flag with a white wolf and a northern star projected onto one of the still-standing buildings.

A flag of the Northern Lycan Kingdom.