

## Chapter 66 - The Alpha God's Luna

Nikki spent her life on the Firstborn Island surrounded by all kinds of shifters, but she had never seen a monster like that. The warehouse she was held in was dark, so the dull glow of the creature's eyes caught her gaze and sent a shiver down her spine. It wasn't pointed at anyone in particular, but still gave off such a menacing aura that Nikiah cringed in her chair.

Luckily, five men stood between her and the creature. There used to be more, judging by the blood dripping from the Beast's mouth. He reeked of death.

Three werewolves, one werebear and a fox shifter, turned one by one, and every muscle in Nikki's body strained. She could tell it wouldn't be enough.

Her captors launched their attack, charging at their enemy in turns.

Big mistake. The only chance they had was if they worked in sync, which they did not. If Astrea was here, she would have rolled her eyes and called them morons.

A wolf lunged, snarling as he leapt at the beast, and the latter didn't even turn his head to look at it, raising his enormous paw with what looked like talons. Those slashed the enemy's chest, throwing him away as if he was nothing.

The monster stepped into the light, and Nikki's lips parted as she took it in. It resembled a white bear, but when it snarled, she saw rows of the sharpest canines. The bloody talons also did not belong there, and neither did the spikes on the back.

What kind of monster was that?

Most of all, she was terrified to see the enormous wings. Those looked as if they belonged to a dragon, each wingtip bearing a sinister adornment—a curled spike that made him look like a demon. Was he one?

This bear-like creature seemed to defy the laws of nature. He moved so fast, leaving dead bodies in his wake. Screams of her captors pierced her ears as she tried to free herself from the silver chains, afraid she would be next.

She had to flee.

Luckily, the silver bindings weren't that tight, and after considering becoming the beast's dinner, she chose to break a few bones on her wrist to squeeze it out of the chains. The little sacrifice seemed reasonable.

A fox, covered in its own blood, landed at her feet when she was free and out of breath.

Nikki realised the warehouse became too quiet as she watched the puddle of wine-red liquid growing on the ground. She was screwed.

Hot breath burned the skin on her back through the flimsy fabric of her top.

She could only hope these wouldn't be her last minutes, but chances were slim. Her wrists wouldn't be able to regenerate in time, and if she shifted, this would slow her down.

Yet the creature didn't move. It smelled of blood and smoke.

And chestnuts... with a hint of wintergreen.

Slowly, cautious of her every move, Nikki turned on her heels and locked her eyes with the creature, realising it did not see her. The dull glow was still there, but...

"It can't be!" she whispered. She knew Darius was a white werebear shifter from the North. He was Joran's champion, and they said he grew some spikes during the war thanks to the blessing. But this... this was something else completely.

Not to mention she thought he had died in the penthouse. The thought she didn't let herself ponder on.

"Darius?" Her voice was barely a whisper, and yet it echoed through the empty warehouse.

The beast breathed heavily as if a large boulder was being lifted from its chest.

The glow in his eyes died, and they became a greyish-white colour, just like the rest of him.

"Darius!" This time, she was sure it was him. It wasn't a question anymore, but she had so many others. "What—how?"

He shook his head, a million thoughts running through his mind.

Bjorn had no idea how he looked, but he sure felt different as power surged through him. Darker and stickier than before.

He felt the wings, but for now, he wasn't sure how to use them properly. The talons came in handy during the fight. And so did the sharp teeth.

He must have looked hideous and was not sure how to shift back. Her heart was racing in her chest. Bjorn could hear it. He scared her to death.

His whole body flinched when he felt her warm hands slowly wrapping around him. He must have been a spectacle, a real freak... but she didn't seem to care.

Strawberry.

When he found her scent after he awakened, he was so mad knowing she was surrounded by the men who hurt her. He didn't see her when they were defending themselves back at the penthouse, and she gave those assassins a good fight, but he knew those men harmed Nikki when the scent of her blood hit his nostrils.

They hurt her, thus signing their own death certificates.

He closed his eyes, trying to sniff her. Did she have any actively bleeding wounds? Was she okay?

"Darius, give me a sign it's you, and I am not hugging a monster bear who will eat me for breakfast," she said, her face tucked into his fur.

"It's me." He didn't even realise how he shifted back, his hands sliding up her back and pulling her tighter.

"You—"

She was going to say how terrifying and ugly he was. It didn't matter, though. She was fine now. He arrived on time and she was safe...

"You came." Nikki tightened her hug, and Bjorn slowly lowered his head until his lips were touching her hair.

"Of course, I came for you, Strawberry," he planted a small kiss at the top of her head and was about to do it again when she laced her arms around his neck and pulled him closer, crashing her lips into his.

It was so unexpected. He didn't want to ruin that young girl, but neither could he resist her when she was that close, when her taste was now on his tongue.

He deepened the kiss and pressed her against his torso, only now realising he was naked. A little moan escaped her when she dug her nails into him, unable to control herself.

"Darius," she repeated his name when she desperately gasped for air before returning to what they were doing. And he completely lost it.

"Strawberry," he growled, "if you don't stop now, I wouldn't be able to—"

"Then don't!" she breathed into his mouth, and he cursed the men who were now corpses around them. How... unromantic was that? He couldn't do that to her. This... this couldn't be her memory about him later on.

"Not—here, Strawberry," he shook his head, intoxicated by her closeness.

But the fear was stronger. That deep primal fear, born from his past wounds, that she would reject him. That she would give herself to him and then realise how wrong she was.

“I don’t care!” She drew her fingers over his bare back, not wishing to let him go. “Darius, I—I thought they killed you. I—”

“It would have been best for you if they did.”

“Don’t say that!” Nikki furrowed her brows. “If you were as bad as you try to imply, you wouldn’t have bothered coming to save me!”

Bjorn’s jaw ticked.

“Nik, I came to save you because—” He stopped himself in the middle of the sentence, knowing it was best not to finish it.

“Because—what?” Nikki slid her palm over his chiselled chest. He caught her hand, pulling her close again, unable to keep the distance between them. As if they were two magnets.

“Because you are mine,” he said and expected her to retort or at least say something snarky, to distance herself... anything, really. He had been there before.

Nikki felt a prickle of guilt because, for a moment, she was glad he couldn’t see her flushed cheeks.

“You are not going to object?” he asked, and the Firstborn cupped his cheek, brushing her thumb over his scars.

“Why would I?” she whispered.

“Honestly—” The werebear was at a loss for words. “So many reasons come to mind!”

“You know that Vincent is Vidar, right?” She sighed, and his whole body shuddered in response.

“Yes, of course.”

“And Astrea is really Astraea, the one who is destined to become the Star Goddess.” Nikki’s voice quivered.

Bjorn nodded.

“Vidar was there when they were taking me away.” Nikki traced the scar that went over one of his eyes, and he didn’t flinch because he already knew those did not scare her. “He said that Astrea will have to choose between me and—”

He already knew the answer.

“Between me and her real sister.” Darius did not see her, but he could tell she was sad by how the words vibrated in her throat. “He was confident Astrea would choose Riannon, and considering they were about to kill me, I guess he wasn’t wrong.”

“He is a manipulator,” Bjorn assured her. “You shouldn’t fall for his traps.”

Nikki smiled, pressing her cheek against his chest and listening to his heartbeat. Gods, she was happy he was alive.

“You don’t get it,” she drew a little circle on his skin with her finger. “I am not falling for anything. I just—I just realised something.”

“What is it?”

“I love Astrea with all my heart,” the woman confessed. “But if he made me choose between her and you—I don’t think I would have chosen her either. Not anymore. And it’s not because I don’t love her—”

He was afraid to say anything. The world stood still as he waited for her to go on.

“It’s just—I think—I think I love you so much that I can’t imagine living without you. I’d choose you.”

He locked her in his arms, his face buried in her hair and his heart racing. He had two mates, but it was the first time a woman he was in love with truly reciprocated his feelings.

“Say something!” she muttered, tears running down her cheeks.

“Nikiah, I belonged to you from the moment you let me touch you the first time.” He brushed his fingers over her skin. “One contact mixed with your scent, and I was a gone man. I really tried not to fall in love with you. I did everything I could for us to go our separate ways because, gods know, you deserve better—”

She interrupted him firmly. “But I want you!”

“And you have me. All of me. As long as you want me,” he promised. “But right now, we need to go. This is not the place where your first time will happen.”

“Darius, I don’t care! As long as we are together!” Nikki bit her lip, embarrassed to insist more. This was completely new territory for her.

“I know,” Bjorn chuckled, taking her hand. “We are on the outskirts of the city, and I smelled a flower field nearby. That’ll do.”

Nikki’s heart was about to break out of her chest when she laced her fingers with his. This was really happening, and she was ready to go wherever he took her.

However, Darius paused at the door, and she panicked, thinking he changed his mind.

“Can you do something for me?” he asked.

“Of course.” Nikki tried to sound confident.

“The field—I want to take you there on my back.” She was watching him closely and only now noticed a slight tint on his cheeks.

The mighty bear was flustered.

He cleared his throat and added, “I am from the North. We have a tradition of bringing our one and only home on our beasts’ backs. I don’t have a home, but—”

“With pleasure.” Nikki grinned, squeezing his hand tighter, barely able to contain her emotions.

He shifted before her eyes, and this time she studied him slowly, tracing her palm over his wings and every spike he had. She stroked his head, awakening the glow in his glassy eyes again.

He was a real monster now, but he knelt before her and she climbed on, finding a comfortable spot on his back between two large spikes.

And then Bjorn spread his wings...

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Fenrir stormed into the archives, noticing the broken bookshelves. People tried to escape, and it took him some time to get through the crowd.

He found Astrea on her knees before a smirking Vidar, and his heart clenched painfully at the sight. A loud growl left his chest, rumbling through the spacious hall that was now empty.

“What the f\*ck did you do to her?” He wanted to pounce at him, but Warg held him back.

“Look!” he pointed at the dull glow in the distance, and Fenrir’s lips parted in shock.

He was expecting many things, but this wasn’t one of them.

A quick realisation made him clench his fists.

“You again!” Vidar chuckled. “My betrothed and I were catching up, but you can never leave us alone, can you? Always the third wheel in our relationship.”

“You took the dragonfly away?” Fenrir seethed. “How?”

“It’s been so long.” The God of Vengeance looked smug. “The magic wore off, weakened. After all, she was using it all the time.”

Astrea tried to steady her breathing on the floor. It felt like he had torn a part of her soul with that dragonfly, and she still couldn’t process what that meant.

“How insecure can you get when you have to do something like this?” Fenrir snarled.

Footsteps echoed behind his back, signalling Devoss and Bash’s arrival.

“Don’t you get it?” Vidar’s lips curled into a smirk. “Her human body is dying. Tick Tock.”

“B\*stard!” The wolf was ready to rip his head off. “Be a man for once and have a fight with me! The winner will—”

“I have no need to fight you, mutt!” Vidar gritted his teeth, his eyes emitting a red glow. “I am the ruler of Asgard, the immortal god in full power! You are scum under my feet! I have already won, and this is just the last piece of the puzzle.”

Astrea stood up on wobbly feet, leaning onto the column next to her. She felt weaker. Much weaker.

“Step away from her!” Fenrir was on the verge of exploding.

Vidar observed the two lovers with a sneer. They hadn’t realised it was over for them yet, but here it was—his victory. At last.

“And if I do, what will happen?” He arched his brow dramatically, folding his hands over his chest. “How can you help her? She will only be immortal if she lives in Asgard and that’s something you cannot offer, mutt.”

Fenrir clenched his jaw, and his enemy threw his head back, laughing.

“I guess this is the real test,” Vidar continued. “Do you love her enough to let me have her?”

“That’s not for any of you to decide!” Astrea snarled, growing her claws to accelerate healing. Nova was working as fast as she could, but they still felt excruciating pain.

“On the contrary.” The God of Vengeance cast her a disdainful look. “That’s between me and him. You were always the collateral damage in our story.”

“How romantic!” She fumed.

“Believe it or not, I never wanted to hurt you.” Vidar’s voice softened as he peered at her. “I wished for us to have a family one day. Just imagine what heirs you and I could have had—And

now, if you stay with him, you will grow old in this mortal body and die. I have seen it before. It's not pretty."

"I'll survive!" Fury coursed through her body.

"No, you literally will not!" Vidar shook his head, pinching the bridge of his nose. "You will be reduced to worms in the ground, and you will never become the mighty goddess you were meant to be."

"I don't care!" Astrea screamed, hating the fact she couldn't fight him right now.

"But what about the world?" Her betrothed wondered nonchalantly. "Don't you care about it, too? You could have brought that balance back if only you had accepted my offer. I can make you my Queen, I can give you immortality back!"

"I don't—" She started saying, when Fenrir interrupted her.

"She agrees!"

Everyone snapped their heads at the Wolf God.

"Fenrir!" Warg was astonished by his side.

"What are you saying?" Tears stung Astrea's eyes.

He locked his eyes with hers, eternal pain storming in his irises.

"We lost, Astrea." He sighed heavily, forcing the words out of himself. "If you go with him, you will be safe."

"Screw safe!" she yelled. "Fenrir, I—"

"It's over!" he bellowed, turning away. "Take her, Vidar, save her—"

"Fenrir!" A sob escaped her as she covered her mouth with the back of her palm, trying to breathe and not fall down. "Don't do this!"

"If you can't do it for you, do it for the people," he told her, barely looking at her.

No one dared to say another word. Fenrir's friends stared at him in shock, but he only clenched his fists so tight his knuckles turned white.

"Finally," Vidar commented, in a voice void of compassion. "At least you still have some sense left."

"Fenrir!" Astrea whispered.

“Should I remind you I have your little friend?” Vidar seemed bored with the drama already. “If you don’t go with me, her life in Asgard will be very sad.”

Astrea’s chest heaved as she cupped her face with her hands.

It was over.

She looked at Fenrir again, and he offered her a sad smile.

“This is the only way,” he whispered.

“My offer will expire soon,” Vidar rushed her as she wiped the tears off her face.

“Fine.” Her voice was dry and hoarse.

The God of Vengeance shifted on his feet and angled his head at her.

“You accept?” He watched her every move intensely.

“I do,” she straightened her back. “Take me back to Asgard. Make me your Queen but promise not to harm Nikki.”

Fenrir’s lips twitched just for a second, but he didn’t let any emotion slip onto his face.

“Is that what you want?” Astrea challenged the man she loved, but the wolf didn’t even flinch.

“Fenrir, are you nuts?” Joran appeared out of nowhere. “What the f\*ck is going on here?”

The Serpent wanted to reach his Dragonfly, but his brother grabbed his arm and stopped him.

“Look!” He pointed at the dragonfly whose wings flapped weakly and erratically. “She is dying!”

“We will find a way! We will—” Joran hectically tried to come up with a solution.

“Too late!” Vidar was already next to Astrea, taking her hand into his and bringing it to his lips.

Before anyone could do anything, flames devoured them both, taking them to Asgard.

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Surrounded by fire, Astrea couldn’t breathe, feeling every cell of her body burning. She wanted to scream, but it was impossible. Two strong hands were holding her, pressing her tight against the scorching torso.

She couldn’t escape this.

However, everything was over in seconds and she lost her balance at once, landing on the moonstone floor.

At first she wanted to stay there because of how cold the stones were, but her senses soon kicked back in and she remembered she wasn't alone.

Vidar watched her, with no emotions on his face.

She glanced around, not recognising the place.

"Wh-where are we?" she asked, getting up herself since he still didn't offer her a hand.

"This is my new palace in the New Asgard," Vidar informed her. "You didn't get to see it, but everything was destroyed here and I had to rebuild the city from scratch."

If he wanted compassion or praise, she was not going to give it to him.

"These are your chamber." Vidar pretended not to notice her attitude. "My Queen's chambers . Built with you in mind."

"But I was dead—"

"No, you never were," he countered. "For me, it was just a waiting game. You were always destined to end up here."

She shivered at the thought and remembered why she was here in the first place.

"So be it." She turned to face him. "The words of the gods are binding. Give me the divinity you promised."

His eyes roamed her face and body.

"No," he said, and her lips parted. It seemed to please him.

"No?" She gasped. "What do you mean no? You promised! The words are—"

"Binding, yes, I know," he confirmed. "But here is the thing: today, when I made my last offer, I said that I would make you my Queen and give you immortality. Immortality is not exactly divinity, don't you think? And I intend to give you everything I promised today."

"You—" She let her eyes glow, allowing Nova to surface in a warning, but it only made the God of Vengeance chuckle.

"Cute!" He dismissed her challenge. "Don't get me wrong, Astrea, I can give you divinity. You just have to earn it first."

“Earn it how?” She seethed.

“By being a good little Queen,” he smirked at her. “And following my orders. You need to earn my trust.”

“Trust goes both ways, and you just tricked me!” She raised her voice, but he did not care. He was enjoying this. All of this.

“We will work on that,” Vidar assured her. “And now, excuse me, I need to go. Get used to your new surroundings and—change before dinner.”

She shouted a curse, but he disappeared in flames, leaving her alone in this immaculate cold room.

Astrea ran to the windows, to look at the gleaming city, but did not allow herself to admire it for a long time. Then she ran to the doors and tried them, but they were locked.

She walked around the spacious room designated just for her until she saw herself in a tall golden mirror with an intricate frame.

Her hair was a mess. She still had dust smudged over her cheek from when she was helping the victims of the explosion. Deep dark circles around her eyes reminded her that she desperately needed sleep.

And yet, a little smile curled onto her lips.

She made it.

Their plan was working.