

## Chapter 68 - The Alpha God's Luna

“I must say, you look so different.” Vidar gestured for her to join him at the table right after Magnus bowed and left them alone. The God of Vengeance pretended to ignore the charred landscape around them while studying her face for a reaction to it.

She offered none and soon recognised the cruel glint in his eyes. He craved to see her pain over this. He still didn’t think he punished her enough. It probably would never be enough for him.

“Back in the day, you used to have this—ethereal glow around you that is now gone. You lost it completely.”

His gaze was shamelessly wandering over her body, making her want to cover away from him, but she was used to handling herself in unpleasant situations. He was the one not ready for her. Not the other way around.

“Maybe you shouldn’t have killed me if you liked it so much, then?” Astrea retaliated, brushing her fingers over the golden cutlery on the table before she took her seat. Pure gold. He wanted her to see the two contrasts, and now she knew him enough to understand the hint. The ruler of New Asgard could make her life as barren as the garden they were in, or he could bathe her in silk and gold if she behaved.

She preferred neither.

“It was never my desire.” His lips curled as if she had said something funny. His twisted nature enjoyed every minute of their encounter.

“And yet here we are.” She offered him an unimpressed glance. “Centuries later. Same place. I have to say, the garden looks freshly burned, though. One would think life could find a way to restore itself since Ragnarok.”

“I destroyed this place long before Ragnarok,” Vidar admitted, admiring his work as if there was something to be proud of. “And many times after that. The first time I burned it was on the day my sword took your life. I couldn’t stand seeing it anymore. It reminded me of you.”

“How romantic,” she scoffed, leaning over the back of her chair while he observed her every move.

“And then I burned it down every time I thought of you or saw a sprout of life here.” Their eyes locked, and she knew there was no love in him. Not for her, not for anyone. He wasn’t capable of it.

Gods were given powers that suited them most. He was a God of Vengeance because it was in his nature. There was no way around it.

“Did it help?” she asked, and he arched a brow at her.

“What did?”

“Destroying the Glowing Garden over and over. Did it help you feel better?”

“Only one thing could help me feel better.” Vidar’s tone got darker. “To get what is rightfully mine.”

“And by that, you mean—?”

She wanted to roll her eyes badly, tired of him already.

She had to listen to him, though. That was the game, and she had to play it right.

“Everything!” Vidar slammed his fist over the table, causing the glass to clink. “I want to have the bride I was promised, the power and respect that were supposed to come with it. You and I were meant to rule Seven Realms together. Our children were supposed to become the new generation of gods. I want to enjoy our mate bond and not feel like I am thrown into lava each time that mutt touches you!”

She felt the tiniest prickle of guilt. Was this why her mate became so—crazy and obsessed? The bond definitely had its downsides for him too.

It did not matter, though. Nothing excused what he had done. Not to mention, he was the one not wishing to destroy the mate bond. He was the one clinging to her despite so many rejections.

He was a child who still refused to hear no, and she was not sorry for him.

“You are the ruler of the New Asgard,” Astrea commented, trying to stay civil. “Surely you have enough power and respect. Any woman could be yours. You don’t need me.”

Vidar’s eyes flashed red again.

“You think I did not try to forget you existed?” His lips twisted into a menacing smirk. “So many women were in my bed I lost count centuries ago.”

She swallowed uncomfortably.

Maybe he just needed a better math teacher. Nova snorted.

“And yet each time I went down to the mortal realm, each time I saw a glimpse of you, each time I touched you, kissed you—”

She shivered at the thought, and it did not escape him, a frown deepening on his face.

“You were mine!” He snarled at her. “We were destined for each other. We belong together, and yet each time you met that mutt, you chose him. Each. Fucking. Time.”

“Then, maybe we weren’t destined for each other after all,” she stated calmly, and his features hardened, making him resemble one of the ancient statues.

“Or maybe the son of Loki used sorcery to bind you to him!”

She pursed her lips, digesting what he had said. A part of her was still hoping he could be reasonable, but there was no chance if that was what he believed in.

“You know it’s not true,” she sighed. “Fenrir and I—It was written in the stars. Over and over.”

Vidar threw his glass over the remnants of the willow tree, breaking it into myriads of pieces in a fury.

“The stars wrote a sad story then!” He said through clenched teeth. “So many attempts and no happy ending. Don’t you think it’s time to try something new?”

He waited for her reply, and she knew it was best to say something to put him at ease, something to stroke his enormous ego.

She bit her lip, almost drawing blood. That was a hard challenge.

Screw him, Nova hissed in her mind. At the moment, he needs us more than we need him. The wedding blood-sharing ritual has to be willing and mutual for it to work. He will have to play nice.

You are right, Astrea agreed, feeling her blood boiling.

“There is nothing new about this.” She exhaled heavily. “We don’t work. You tested this many times and ended up killing me every other life. So much for a happy ending.”

Vidar’s jaw ticked. “So what?”

His question caught her off guard.

“So what?” she repeated with a gasp. Even after everything, she was surprised at how little her deaths meant to him. She could feel the trauma of her past lives with her bones. The tragedies that happened long ago marked her soul and almost destroyed Fenrir.

Vidar, on the other hand, seemed fine.

“Your little friend is at my mercy, Astrea. Do you really want to make her life that short?” The man before her smirked, knowing he had just won the argument. He had the leverage.

“I would like to see Nikki, by the way.” She tried to look calm when, in fact, her heart was racing with worry for her friend.

“I am afraid she doesn’t want to see you,” Vidar sneered. “The news you chose your real sister over her didn’t sit well with that one. She has quite the temper.”

Astrea’s claws grew uncontrollably, and she dug them into the armrest, realising he was again playing with her. What if Nikki didn’t want to go with her when the time came? This could complicate their plan because Astrea couldn’t leave her ward alone.

“That’s another thing we need to talk about.” Vidar cast her an irritated look. “We need to get rid of that.”

“That?” She stared at him, puzzled at first. Slowly, she traced his gaze and realised he was staring at her, claws still digging into the chair.

“I don’t want those mutt genes passed on to our children,” he explained, pointing at her hands and causing Nova to growl. “That wolf has to go. You are my Queen, and I don’t want that beast inside you.”

“Nova is a part of me!” Astrea was appalled to hear this, even as a suggestion.

“A dirty and unnecessary part!” Vidar insisted. “You will not need the beast once we are married.”

So, he wanted her as weak as possible. That was that.

Just play along, Nova growled. It’s not like we are going to marry him, anyway.

True, Astrea retracted her claws. I’d better die again. Literally nothing else is worse than this man.

“I will think about it,” she said aloud and pursed her lips, wishing for the dinner to begin already so that the two of them didn’t have to talk anymore.

“You didn’t really think you’d be able to keep her,” her mate said. “If you ever wanted to get your divinity, you’d have to say goodbye to her anyway. Werewolves can’t be gods. It doesn’t work like that. Besides, what’s another wolf to you? Your constant rebirths ensured each wolf spirit was dissipated later. Surely you knew that.”

She wanted to stab him with one of his fancy golden knives, but several servants appeared out of nowhere, pouring wine and removing dome lids from the golden dishes.

Astrea could feel how restless Nova was. They both refused to think about what her getting the divine powers back implied. The world needed her as Astraea, not just Astrea. But she needed Nova, her loyal companion.

We'll figure something out, her wolf assured her. We always do.

Astrea hated this. No matter what she did or how hard she and Fenrir tried, someone they loved would end up hurt.

One of the servants brought a tray of bread for her, and she waved him off.

“Please, help yourself to anything you like—” Vidar gestured at the food, encouraging her to eat and clearly hoping for a change of subject. “Divine food tastes different. I am sure you remember. It’s been a while since you’ve been treated like the goddess that you are.”

“You’d be surprised,” Astrea’s words were laced with venom as she forgot who she was talking to for just a mere moment. “Fenrir worshipped me whole just hours ago—”

The God of Vengeance’s eyes glowed intense red, and he moved so fast she didn’t have time to react before his palm wrapped around her neck, lifting her up in the air.

“You really shouldn’t have said that!” he hissed as she struggled against his grip. A mortal against a god.

Now Astrea knew how he had managed to kill her so many times. If just a few words were enough to make him attack her...

However, she refused to be the victim again. He took too much from her. From everyone she loved.

Not to mention that she was a whole different person now.

Hectically, she scanned the space around them and kicked the table with a glass goblet balancing on the edge in less than a second. She caught it and, not wasting time, splashed it in Vidar’s face, shocking him momentarily. His grip on her neck was still too tight, so she smashed the glass over the wooden edge and stabbed his hand with what was left of it, digging the glass as deep into his flesh as she could.

Vidar screamed, releasing his grip and letting her fall to the burnt ground, her beautiful white dress stained both with soot and his blood.

“You ungrateful b\*tch!” He raised his arm, a fire sword appearing in it.

She knew that sword. She remembered it all too well, along with the metallic taste of blood in her mouth it gifted her every encounter they had.

Astrea wanted to shove that sword up his arrogant ass and grabbed as many ashes as she could fit into her palm, ready to throw it in his face for a distraction.

“Stop!” a resounding female voice interrupted them as their heads snapped toward the Moon Goddess.

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“Excuse me?” Joran stared at his brother, arrogance replaced by confusion on his face.

“You heard me,” Fenrir taunted mercilessly. “Let’s not pretend you weren’t thinking about it, dreaming even.”

The Serpent’s jaw flexed, and he stood up, fists clenching.

“Even if I did, never in a million years would I imagine you of all the gods offering yourself on a silver platter like this.”

“So?” Fenrir let out a dark chuckle. “Does it taste better when you lace it with betrayal, and I know nothing of it?”

Joran closed his eyes just for a moment, rubbing the bridge of his nose. “Is that what you think of me?”

“Can you blame me?” The wolf god scoffed and stretched his neck, preparing for a fight. “I am shocked I still don’t have a knife in my back, considering my generous offer. Do I need to turn and pretend I don’t see it? Would that work for you?”

“I think I’ll pass.” Joran gritted his teeth and started walking towards the exit when Fenrir caught up with him and punched his jaw.

Hard.

The sound of cracking bones made Riannon flinch, and Gideon carefully tried to lead her as far away from the two divine siblings as possible. At the same time, Kara, Bash, Devoss and Warg watched them from different corners of the room, barely reacting to the show.

“Are you nuts?!” Joran seethed, spitting blood.

“Maybe I am just tired of letting you get away with everything. This was a long time coming.” Fenrir circled him just like a predator would do with his prey.

“I am not playing this game! Not when Astrea—“

“You are not to speak her name!”

Another powerful blow, and Joran staggered, trying to keep his balance.

“I protected her for years!” The dragon wiped the blood away from his face. “Better than anyone ever before!”

“You tortured her more than Vidar did!” Fenrir growled, and that seemed to work because Joran charged at him, eyes glowing and claws elongating simultaneously.

“Take that back!” he yelled, trying to at least scratch his brother, but the wolf dodged each time, angering him more.

“It’s the truth!” the wolf deity snarled, secretly locking his gaze with Kara, who nodded promptly, signalling to him that this was enough. “Even that psychopath didn’t think of putting her in a silver pit!”

Fenrir froze just for a moment, and immediately, his sibling’s sharp claws sliced through his chest. For a whole moment, Joran felt how close his brother’s heart was to his fingertips, feeling the vibrations of its beats. So close... and so wrong.

He retracted his claws, stepping away. If Astrea saw him now, she would have attacked him herself. He knew that much.

The sound of something heavy hitting the floor brought him back to reality, and he turned on his heels to see Fenrir kneeling on the ground, his palm on his chest just where he had pierced him moments ago. Dark blood, the colour of the finest wine, was soaking through his fingers, and Joran’s lips parted in shock from the realisation that, for some reason, his brother was not regenerating.

A half-smile playing on his lips made his stomach churn.

“What did you do?” The Serpent whispered in horror as it dawned on him that Fenrir coughed blood, meaning something was fundamentally wrong with him.

Gideon Stormhold was about to move, but his wife stopped him, shaking her head.

They knew. They all knew.

“I can never leave her alone with that monster! Plan or no plan—” Fenrir confessed with a heavy sigh, and only then his friends charged towards him, catching him before he fell to the ground.

“You—” Joran’s mind was hectically trying to understand what was happening.

Fenrir opened his palm to demonstrate the magical dust left after he activated one of his crystal beads.

“You stopped your own regeneration!” The dragon felt a surge of nausea, his head spinning. He guessed that part but still couldn’t see the reason behind it. How would this help Astrea?

“I’ve done more than that,” Fenrir chuckled. “I paused my immortality too.”

“What kind of ability is that?” Joran felt panic coursing through his veins. He had never met someone with such power before.

“The one I took it from considered it a curse,” his brother confessed. “Don’t you worry. There was only one bead like that. It was a rare gift.”

“We need to go!” Kara said, trying to sound firm, but her voice betrayed her, quivering by the end of the sentence. “I haven’t done this for so long!”

“Done what?!” Joran demanded, angry they treated him as if he was not there. The pool of blood next to his brother was getting bigger, and surely that wasn’t a good sign.

Suddenly, his fingers burned as if he summoned fire, and the dragon realised, this time, the blood coating them was causing it.

His brother was dying, and it was his doing.

“Hurry up,” Fenrir hissed from the pain as they carefully placed him on the ground. Riannon brought a little cushion to place under his head.

“What is this? What the hell are you all doing?” Joran felt he was about to shift right here in this room and demand answers. Fenrir looked so pale...

Bash turned away, not able to see his father like this. Devoss patted his shoulder gently while Warg knelt at his creator’s side.

Kara towered over the Wolf God, a soft glow coating her.

Joran recognised this glow and did not flinch when two golden wings spread behind the woman’s back. The Valkyrie stretched her hand to Fenrir.

“Rise, brave warrior, and join the ranks of the honoured. Your valour and courage have earned you a place among the chosen. Fear not, for your spirit shall be carried to the halls of glory, and I will be your guide.”

“No!” The dragon stormed towards them to stop the madness, and this time, both Bash and Devoss stood in his way, restraining them. The only two in the room capable of holding him back.

“What are you doing? Stop this!” Joran bellowed, trying to shake them off.

“It has to be done, uncle!” Bash tried to explain, but he did not listen because Fenrir took the Valkyrie’s hand and rose... while his body remained breathless on the floor.

“You have about an hour in this world’s time,” Riannon told them. “After that time, no one will be able to reanimate him. Not even the bead he gave me would help. One hour is all you have.”

“Then we better be quick,” Fenrir’s spirit nodded, still holding Kara’s hand as the Valkyrie created a portal.

“Fenrir, don’t be a fool!” Joran screamed. “You will not be able to come back from this! No woman is worth it!”

His wolf sibling locked eyes with him, a slow curl to his lips.

“I know you can’t understand it, and that’s okay. I forgive you for everything, Jor. Thanks for your help tonight.”

This wasn’t the answer Joran wanted to hear, so he tried to free himself, struggling against the other two deities as he watched his brother and the Valkyrie depart to Valhalla.

Someone let out a gut-wrenching scream that pierced everyone’s ears and reverberated through the room. It took Joran some time to realise that he was the one screaming, his throat tightening painfully.

Riannon poured some potion over the breathless body’s chest that stopped the bleeding but definitely did not bring Fenrir back to life.

“Why—” Joran asked in a hoarse voice when Bash and Devoss finally let him go, opening their own portal. Only Fenrir and Joran were banished from the divine realm.

“Because there was no other way for Father to return to Asgard,” his nephew informed him out of pity.

“He had to be killed in a proper fight,” Warg added, preparing to go with his friends. “By an enemy.”