

A Gift from the Goddess by Dawn Rosewood Chapter 19

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Everyone in the room bowed their head in respect, the exception being Cai who was not from the pack and therefore was not required to show submission. We all waited as Alpha Tytus took his seat in the middle on the largest chair.

“You may raise your heads,” Tytus said.

Everyone in the room lifted their gaze.

Alpha Tytus was a kind man when compared to his son. He was stern and intelligent but he could be very personable despite his sometimes tough demeanour. He had the same black hair as Aleric, though greying now in his old age, however, his eyes were dark brown, not green.

Tytus had a fearsome reputation throughout the country and was undefeated in every battle he had partaken in. Because of this, many refused to cross him. This allowed for the Winter Mist to remain almost untouched over the years since he would reward and respect people immensely if they remained on his good side. I had always tread carefully to stay on that side of him, all the way up until the accident that had claimed his life several years from now.

“Aria, it’s very nice to see you again. I only wish this was under better circumstances,” he started, his tone friendly

“Alpha, I am honoured to be in your presence,” I said and quickly bowed respectfully again.

“I knew our Aria was incredibly bright for her age, but I am happy to see that she has grown to be a brave fighter also. And you too, Cai. I feel our pack is now indebted to you and Aria both for your courageous acts in saving Myra.”

“Our pack is your pack,” Cai replied using the traditional saying amongst allied territories.

“Now,” Tytus said, “I need to hear the details of how this has all come about since we are short on time. We have one of the four that attacked you in custody, but he is still refusing to talk.”

I was surprised to hear that any were still alive given the amount of blood that had been Cai. However, if I were to guess which one was in custody, I would think it would be the large brown wolf that Cai had struggled with the most. He seemed like the type to not be taken down easily and possibly may even be a . ranked member.

"I understand that Myra was ambushed in the woods. Aria, you knew this ambush was to occur and you enlisted the help of Cai to save her at very short notice. From what I've been told, you both fought valiantly."

"Alpha, it was due to Cai that we are both still alive right now. Please give him the credit."

"Humble, are we? I had heard you still managed to snap the neck of a wolf whilst being savagely pinned down from a bite to the shoulder. That is still worthy of praise."

It had been pure luck that I'd managed to accomplish that feat but I didn't correct him.

"Now, please, tell me the details," Tytus said, trying to bring the conversation back to the important parts. "Aria, how did you learn of the ambush?"

I knew this question would come up and yet I still didn't have a clear answer to reply with. I needed to say something believable that would hopefully not lead to more questions.

"I was in the woods the day prior to the ambush and had felt the presence of others watching. It bothered me enough that I continued to think about it into the next day. It wasn't until the afternoon that I realised that, if they had been warriors from our pack, they would have made themselves known. The only other

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solution I could think of was a possible threat incoming. Cai offered to help knowing I wouldn't be strong enough to fight off danger alone. It was lucky we investigated the area when we did since Myra appeared not long after we arrived and was attacked."

I could see my father was confused at what I was saying. He probably realised I was home with the family the night I was claiming to have been in the woods, therefore making my story seem odd. But I was silently grateful he didn't mention any of his suspicions aloud. With the news of the mark, he probably knew that it was not the time to draw further attention to myself.

"Very lucky indeed! I see we were very fortunate that you realised in time," Tytus said.

He then turned to the ranked members next to him. "Have we had any progress in discovering who was behind the attack?"

"None so far, Alpha," said Gamma Oliver, Brayden's father. "But we're continuing the interrogation on the surviving wolf."

Tytus made a sound of thoughtful thinking.

The truth was I knew exactly who the wolves belong to, and even knew how they were eventually dealt with. Years later, after being curious about the death of a girl in my junior year, I had decided to briefly read the details in a war book. This was back when I was studying modern battle strategy.

“Cai and Aria, did you see anything during the fight that would shed any insight into who was responsible?”

“No, Alpha Tytus,” Cai responded immediately.

...But I hesitated. I didn't see anything of course, but I knew the answer.

“Aria?” Tytus pushed, sensing my reluctance.

I considered the implication of telling him and didn't see any harm in revealing the pack that was responsible. But though I wanted to change the future, I needed to think of the implications when it came to things like this. There was always the possibility it would make things worse, not better. Especially given my current new status.

“... I did not see anything, Alpha,” I started. “...However, I do have a theory if you would like to hear it?”

Theories were better than facts. Whether they chose to believe me, it would be their own decision to make.

“Please, go ahead,” he said eagerly.

“...I believe the Jade Moon pack are responsible.”

“Don't be ridiculous!” shouted Gamma Oliver suddenly. “Alpha, why are you listening to theories from a child?”

Like father, like son I guess; too stubborn to look past their own views. I could see why he might be angry though, I was calling out an allied pack of committing a grave crime.

The Alpha raised his hand in order to silence Oliver.

“Please explain further, Aria,” he said with a gentle smile.

I cleared my throat. “As we all know, the Jade Moon pack has recently had their Alpha heir ascend to power after his father passed away. It's no secret he is young with bold ideas for his new authority and has proven already how unsteady he can be. I believe it's possible he is now unhappy with the alliance tax on his territory given their pack is already largely reliant on incoming resources – their land itself not being able to provide

e adequately for all of their members. You would need to confirm with the man you have captured, but I believe if you start questioning him about the Jade Moon pack, you will soon have your answers.”

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“Ho—

oh! That is indeed a brilliant theory, Aria! I can’t deny that I, too, have heard rumours of their pack becoming increasingly agitated,” Tytus said, his eyes holding a glint of excitement. He then turned to the elders and ranked members next to him. “If this is indeed the Jade Moon pack, then how do you propose we deal with them?”

There was silence from the council as everyone speculated what would be the best course of action.

“I have an idea, Alpha,” Oliver finally spoke up.

“Let’s hear it then.”

“I propose a full-frontal attack. They are a small territory and do not have the resources to defend. It would be a very simple matter of taking over their land and ending any questions as to our pack’s authority. This will also send a message to the other packs who may be thinking of rebelling.”

“Mmmm, yes, I can see how that might work...,” Tytus mused. “...But I think I’d also like to hear from the young lady and know her thoughts on the matter.”

The Alpha then turned his eyes to me. I could see the curiosity they held, mixed with anticipation.

“What do you think, Aria?” Tytus asked. “What do you propose would be our best course of action if this is in fact the Jade Moon pack?”

I knew exactly what he was doing. This was a test. With the recent talks of my new mark, he was now sizing up my abilities for leadership. To see whether I would become a threat or asset to the pack.

The truth though was that the question put me in a difficult position, one where I would need to make a choice. My first option was I could sit back and allow for history to take its course naturally. In doing so though, some pack members would be killed by implementing the reckless plan Oliver proposed. It wasn’t until halfway into carrying out his idea that Elder Luke would come up with the strategy that ultimately dealt with the Jade Moon pack. However, by the time his effective strategy was implemented, many

had already died. Oliver's plan carelessly didn't take into account the landscape the battle would take place

The second option was I could tell them how this war could be resolved immediately, sparing the lives of our pack warrior and even the lives of some innocents on both sides.

The main issue I was now facing was that, if I went with the second option, I would be drawing immediate attention to myself, furthering the difficult position I was already in. Tytus would then recognise me and my abilities, encouraging the speculations about my Goddess mark. That could become potentially dangerous very quickly if he felt threatened.

The way I saw it, the choice was either to protect myself... or to save others.

And as I looked up into the Alpha's dark calculating eyes, eyes that I knew were hiding a secret intent behind them... I knew what I had to do.