

A Gift from the Goddess by Dawn Rosewood

Chapter 21-25

Chapter Twenty-One ! IMPORTANT ! (AUTHOR NOTE): Hi everyone! The GoodNovel APP version does not support formats (e.g. bold, italics etc), meaning this chapter might be a little difficult to understand at first. To make it easier, I've now added '*' to speech that is being said ONLY in Aria's head (as a memory of her past). In future chapters, I will also be using single quotes' for just things Aria says to herself internally. An author note reminder will be added to the next chapter it's used, which hopefully assists in reading/understanding what's happening. No...

He couldn't be here. He wasn't supposed to be here yet.

1*"You are nothing, Ariadne,"* I heard his voice speak in my head, an old memory replaying from my past life. "*"You are only here because I let you be here."*

No, please, no... I'm not ready... "*"You have been found guilty of the charges against you."*

Cold, familiar green eyes stared down at me.

Piercing. Like a tiger watching its prey with curiosity. "*"Therefore, with the power held within me, I, Aleric Dumont, Alpha of the Winter Mist Pack..."

I took two steps back slowly, unable to take my eyes off the man in front of me. "*"...Sentence you, Ariadne Chrysalis, former Luna of the Winter Mist Pack..."*) "Aria?" a familiar friendly voice called out beside me. However, I couldn't register their words.

1*"...To death."*

I fell backwards to the floor in front of the man who had been my death.

...Who will be my death.

"*"Your sentence is to be carried out immediately."*

No, please, make it stop.

I covered my ears feebly as the rational side of my brain tried to convince me this wasn't real, that the voice was just a memory inside my head and nothing more.

Stop... stop... stop... STOP... STOP....STOP... STOP...

My body began to rock, trying to force the memories to leave me alone.

“Ariadne?”

That was his voice. It broke through my mental turmoil enough to make me freeze. It was

exactly the same. Nothing was different. Nothing had changed. “... Why are you here?” I managed to whisper. However, I wasn’t sure if I was asking the question to him or asking myself.

“You realise this is my pack and I’m allowed to be here, right? They called me back home due t o an emergency with that girl who was attacked. I’ve only just arrived.” But when I didn’t reply he frowned.

“You know, it’s rude to present yourself in this manner to your future Alpha,” he said, a tone o f annoyance in his voice. The way he spoke wasn’t filled with the same level of hatred that I had become accustomed to hearing, but it still sent chills down my spine nonetheless.

“Ariadne, please get up. You’re embarrassing me in front of a future Alpha within our alliance.

I could hear what he was saying but all I could see was the swing of the broadsword before it hit my neck Over... and over... and over... and over again.... “Are you honestly just going to completely ignore what I’m saying to you?” he said, increasingly becoming angrier. I couldn’t get my body to respond. Nothing I did would let me take control. I was helpless to him, just as I had been in the past.

...So helpless.

I wasn’t different. I hadn’t changed. He was fated to control my life no matter how many times I came back

“Stop it! Get up right now!” I could feel the tone of his Alpha authority trying to command m e, but even that wasn’t able to get through to me.

When he saw me still refusing to move, he eventually lost patience and reached his hand out towards me. And at that, my body finally did react.

I flinched, turning my face away as I held my hands up in defence against the slap I expected was about to land.

...Only it never came.

I dared to peek up at him and saw he held a look of shock at my response, the hand he had stretched out having stopped midway before making contact. I looked at his arm and, to my surprise, I saw how it was positioned as if he had been planning to pull me to

my feet rather than slap me. I'd acted on impulse when there had been no real danger of physical pain.

"I think it might be best not to touch her and leave her be," Cai said, stepping in. Cai was here. This was real. This wasn't the trial grounds. Aleric wouldn't be able to kill me without a valid reason in front of a witness. "What are you on about? I haven't even done anything to her and she's acting like a complete

fool." He gestured down at me however, I found I was unable to stop the involuntary flinch that shook me once again; the sight of his quick movement towards me having triggered the muscle memory.

"I'd say by the looks of things that she really doesn't feel like being around you right now. Probably best to also keep in mind she's been in a coma for the last three days and was released only about two hours ago."

Cai bent down and gently touched my trembling shoulder. I wanted to look at him, to look into his kind eyes for reassurance, but I couldn't make myself lose sight of Aleric. My body's natural reaction was to fear the pain he could inflict at any second.

"Don't touch her," Aleric growled. "She doesn't belong to you."

"Guess you didn't hear the news yet, but she doesn't 'belong' to anyone anymore," Cai replied in a casual tone, completely unphased by Aleric's attitude. "Besides, I don't think I need to remind you, but you do realise that you're not actually officially confirmed as mates yet, right?"

"Doesn't belong to anyone'? What's that supposed to mean?" "Probably best to have a chat with your old man about that one. For now though," Cai said scooping my tiny body up into his arms with ease, "I think you're giving the poor girl a panic attack"

My eyes widened in fear as Cai picked me up. Aleric was going to kill him. He was going to kill me. He wasn't allowed to touch me like this.

I watched in horror as Aleric then stepped forward, blocking Cai from exiting. He puffed up his chest as if he was about to challenge Cai right then and there for daring to touch what he believed was his.

Aleric had never loved me but I knew he had loved to possess me in our past life. He had kept me caged the entire time we were together, cutting off all ties of friendships I had tried to make with anyone of worthy status.

So now, seeing someone else holding me like this right in front of him? Well, if Cai wasn't from an allied pack, I was sure he would have been dead or down in the cells

already by now. Or at least, the Aleric from my past would have done that. I never knew him well at this age but I could only imagine he was much the same.

Seeing the two of them standing together was almost surreal. Even though they were both still only teenagers, both of them stood tall and were as well-built as you would expect an Alpha to be. I was terrified to think of what a fight between them would look like.

I knew from previous experience that Aleric was like nothing else when it came to the battlefield. Just like his father before him, he had become completely undefeated once he had ascended to power. But I couldn't deny that I had seen what Cai was capable of even without his fully shifted abilities. He was frighteningly dangerous with all of his training. "Do you really want to start something with a kid having a mental breakdown in my arms?" Cai queried, tilting his head slightly to scrutinise Aleric with his eyes. "Can't we both agree that the best thing for her right now is to take her back to the hospital to recover? She was dragged out of bed prematurely due to your Alpha requesting an audience with us urgently. Or

should I go and ask your Alpha why the Beta's daughter is being prevented from receiving medical attention?"

Aleric stared at him coldly for a few more seconds before finally deflating, having thought better of the situation. Begrudgingly, he stepped aside to allow Cai to carry me outside. The two locked eyes as they walked by; Aleric's fiery and furious gaze, and Cai's collected and unreadable one.

It wasn't until the door to the meeting hall finally clicked shut behind us that I felt my body begin to relax. I was still on edge, knowing that Aleric was nearby and at any minute could come for me, but having Cai by me was reassuring. Aleric wouldn't be able to risk starting anything publicly that could be blatantly detrimental to the pack's political ties. He wasn't an Alpha yet. "So much for 'I'm the fucking future Luna of this pack', aye?" Cai said jokingly, trying to quote what I'd said to him before Myra was attacked. I knew he was trying to help lighten the mood and distract me, but inside I felt destroyed and utterly defeated. I'd been working so hard to become a different person this time around and yet I was still weak, haunted by memories that would likely never leave me.

I was completely defenceless to anything Aleric wanted to do to me, eternally trapped by his every whim. The Goddess mark may stop him publicly disgracing me so easily now but I knew that, if he truly was the same as he was in the future, this news may trigger an anger inside him I'd rather prefer to avoid. And the worst part was that, other than the fact that he had sincerely loved Thea, I never actually found out the initial reason for why Aleric hated me so much. How was I meant to diffuse his hostility towards me when I didn't even know what I'd done wrong to begin with?

I looked up at Cai and, as much as I wanted to return his joke with a snarky reply, I did the only thing I was physically capable of doing in that moment. I broke down and cried.

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Chapter Twenty-Two

Chapter Twenty-Two “Woah, little wolf,” Cai said, looking stressed that he’d accidentally upset me further. We had walked into a communal gathering area outside of the hall by this point and I was grateful that no one was around to see me in this state.

He strode up to one of the couches and gently put me down, crouching in front of me so we were eye level. “Do you want me to tell me what that was all about?” Cai asked. When I only continued to cry, he gently touched my shoulder, his tone then becoming darker, more serious. “...Has he hurt you?” It was a question that had a ridiculous answer. Had he hurt me? Yes... and no. Not yet... but at the same time, he had already hurt me far more than a flesh wound could, ruining me to a state that I may never recover from.

I shook my head at him. It wasn’t to say ‘no’ to his question, but rather to show I couldn’t give him the answer he wanted to know.

I wiped the tears from my eyes and tried to calm myself. “I’m too weak, Cai. You had said so yourself as well. I’m always going to be begging for just the right to live.”

Seeing Aleric again and having the same feeling of being powerless made me realise that, if he ever did decide to raise a hand against me again, I would still never be strong enough to stop him. Being book smart in my past hadn’t been enough when he had held my life in his hands every day. “I think you misunderstood,” Cai said. “My words were that you had plenty of time to become stronger. I saw how you handled yourself with those wolves. You have more potential than many to become incredibly strong... if that’s what you truly wanted. I’m sure if it was almost any other kid in that battle, we would have both died.”

I looked up into his eyes and saw he was being serious. “But I saw you in that meeting hall with your Alpha just now,” he continued. “You may not be physically strong, but your intellect is like none I have ever seen before. That’s nothing to be ashamed of, especially at your age.” “Brains aren’t going to stop me from getting murdered,” I mumbled quietly to myself. He moved back a little, shocked at hearing what I’d said.

“Is this about the marking?”

Yes... and no. So many of the questions he was asking me had too many complex answers.

“Somewhat...,” I said, looking down at my lap where I had balled up my fists. “You’re a Beta’s daughter, right? Can’t you just... ask your dad to train you?” It seemed like sound logic on the surface. The reality was that I was sure I’d be letting down my parents if I told them I wanted to pursue training instead of Luna duties. Already I was unsure about what storm awaited me at home after having announced to the entire council I did not wish to be their Luna. Without any notice or inclination, they were most likely going to be incredibly shocked by my public announcement.

Father had said in my past life that nothing I could have done would have disappointed him. But that was the old Aria. The perfect daughter Aria who had worked diligently every day to become the very best she could be for the pack. He would think I was too young to make a final decision, just as the Alpha had.

“There’s no way they’d approve of me wasting time training when I could be inside studying...,” I said with dismay.

Currently, my schedule was made up of school during the day and Luna classes on weekends. Any spare time after school was for self-study and homework. There would be no time for me to dedicate to training without stopping one of those. I didn’t see any way they’d let me drop something they were confident I would probably change my mind on one day. They most likely thought I was going through a phase and would fall head-over-heels for Aleric once I came of age and shifted.

“But haven’t you already announced that you don’t plan on becoming Luna?” I shook my head. “It’s not that simple. They will still prioritise something that they think I may change my mind about one day, over something they don’t believe is necessary for me to learn.”

“...And will you?” he asked. “Will I what?”

“Change your mind about being Aleric’s mate? About being Luna?” I smiled bitterly. “Does it look like I’m going to fall in love with him any time soon?” “Can’t say I’ve ever seen someone look so scared of their mate before they’ve even been confirmed as mates before.” He chuckled darkly. “But are you going to tell me why you reacted like that? I know you said you felt weak, but it honestly doesn’t explain what I saw back there.” I couldn’t tell him, I couldn’t tell anyone. It was better this way. “It’s too difficult to explain... I-I just...” I was trying to find the right words so I wouldn’t sound too strange but I really wasn’t sure what I could possibly tell him. “...He can be very intimidating...” It wasn’t a lie but I hoped it would be enough for Cai to stop asking about it. “Well, I hope you’ll tell me the real reason one day,” he said, and put his hand on my head, petting it gently. I couldn’t help but pout a little at the treatment. Always treating me like a child. “But, if I were you,” he said, standing back up and stretching, “I’d be finding a way to train regardless of what others expect of you. You’re a Saintess now, do whatever you want.” I wish it really were that simple. ...But it did make me pause in thought.

After that, Cai agreed to let me walk myself back to the hospital instead of carrying me, but stayed close by my side just in case I felt like having another mental breakdown. I tried to explain that I was feeling better but he insisted.

It wasn't until we finally arrived that I saw a small figure was pacing nervously in the foyer.

"Myra?" I asked, confused. The girl turned around and a look of relief spread across her face. "Aria!" she yelled, running towards me. She threw her arms around me as if we were best friends and I thought I could feel her crying a little against my shoulder. She stepped back but held onto my hands, looking at me with eyes so red and puffy. "I came to check up on you and was told you were summoned by the Alpha," she said. "I was so worried! You were so sick and then suddenly you were missing from your bed."

"Oh... um... sorry," I said, awkwardly.

"I've been coming by every day and was waiting for you to wake up so I could say thank you. I heard what you did and I owe you my life."

She then looked to my side and realised Cai was present with me also. Her cheeks burned bright red. "Oh... I owe you my life too, Alpha heir," she said and bowed her head a little. She didn't have a legitimate reason for needing to bow to him but I could take a guess over why she was acting that way. Judging from her blush and the lack of eye contact with him, it was easy to see that she, too, had been charmed over by Cai's presence.

I couldn't help but smile a little at seeing the girl having a small crush. She was such a nervous and quiet girl that I found it funny she was attracted to someone as confident and extroverted as Cai.

Cai waved off her thanks. "Not necessary. I was just trying to help wherever possible whilst making sure this one didn't get herself killed." He placed his hand on my head again.

"O-of course," she stuttered, her eyes full of admiration.

I wondered if in her mind Cai was some overly cool older guy, like a male lead in a novel. If she realised that he was actually just a cheeky playboy type, would she lose interest?

I wouldn't ruin the illusion for her. Goddess knew how much I wished I could feel that kind of pure and innocent kind of love. It hadn't worked out for me in the past, and it wouldn't in the future either, knowing my mate would always be Aleric, but at least it was worth keeping an open mind to how love could exist for some. Even possibly between a playboy and a dorky schoolgirl... or, at the very least, Myra could hope it would. "With that said," Cai said, gently pushing me forward. "Time for Aria to get a

check up by the doctor.” “Oh my goodness! I’m so sorry!” Myra gushed. “I’m keeping you here when you should be in

bed. Please get better soon!”

I smiled at her and began walking towards the admin desk where the nurse was.

“Oh! I almost forgot!” Myra yelled out after me. She then ran up to us, digging around in her bag as she did so. “I made you something.” “Made me something?” I asked, surprised. “I wanted to say thank you and this was all I could think of at short notice. I- It’s not nearly enough considering what you did for me! But I hope you like it...” She pulled out a small pendant with a sparkly white stone attached. “It’s a moonstone. It supposedly has a range of uses like healing, inner strength and aiding you through new beginnings. Some other weird ones too. I don’t know whether it works or not but I thought it would suit your hair. If it helps heal you then even better!” I looked at the shimmering gem and could appreciate it was indeed very pretty.

Not wanting to disappoint Myra, I placed the necklace around my neck and tied it at the back. “How does it look, Cai?” I asked, pushing him to praise Myra’s hard work “Ah, I think it looks lovely,” he replied politely. I sneaked a peek and saw Myra blushing brighter. It was so easy to tease her. We soon said our goodbyes to her, and Cai followed not long after my mother arrived. She was worried after hearing the details from Cai about what happened. And though I had tried to play the whole thing off as no big deal, she was frantic once she found out. She fussed over me and asked a lot of questions which I obediently answered, but inside my head I was elsewhere.

Because all I could think about was my new mission. The mission where I’d learn how to fight without my parent’s knowledge.

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Chapter Twenty-Three Once I managed to convince my mother to let me go home, I began to think through my options. There was a lot of risk involved and I didn’t exactly have much knowledge in the area.

Unfortunately, I didn’t end up having much time to myself though as my father came home and immediately told my mother what had happened in the meeting.

...Naturally, she was furious.

I wasn’t sure if it was anger directed at my desire to not be Luna, or maybe just due to the fact I had completely kept them in the dark about the whole thing, but they were frustrated over the entire ordeal. By the end of the argument, I realised that the only thing I took away from the conversation was that it had cemented my decision to not tell them my plan. The plan to take up new training. They also tried to ask me about my Goddess mark, but I remained purposely vague and uncertain with them

about it all until they eventually dropped it. It was something I would need to keep closely guarded and would likely be something I'd never be able to tell them. I loved my parents deeply and were so thankful for them, but there were some things they wouldn't be able to understand if I told them.

School resumed as normal with the exception of my new social interactions, or in some cases lack of. Myra had now taken it upon herself to become my new number one fan and sat with me in the library every day. Having her around me all the time was uncomfortable at first, but I knew she didn't mean any harm. After a while, I even began to get used to having her around. She came off as a genuinely sweet girl and so her positivity was sometimes just what I needed in my day.

That being said, as much as I liked her as a person, a part of me was still refusing to open up to her. I attributed it to my friendship with Sophie in my past life. It felt like I always going to have some sort of a wall now and never truly be able to open up to someone again. Luckily, my guarded nature was something that didn't seem to phase Myra in the slightest.

Cai, on the other hand, was someone I found myself going out of my way to avoid as much as possible. I caught his eye now and then in the hall, to which he waved at me, but inside I was struggling with being able to face him. I couldn't shake the words he'd said to me after the meeting with the Alpha. He'd wanted nothing to do with me and wanted for us to go our separate ways. I was sure he'd only acted so nice to me afterwards because of the whole Aleric interaction; possibly was only still acting in a friendly manner due to it.

Every time I saw his face, I was overwhelmed with guilt and shame. He was only taking pity on me because he'd seen me in such a mentally fragile state. If he'd never witnessed that then I was sure he wouldn't even be acknowledging me at school. I was doing my best to respect his wishes, even if he was too polite to outwardly say it. Apart from Myra and Cai, I also noticed many at the school were starting to treat me differently; even some of the teachers. I heard whispers now and then as they tried to discreetly stare at me, their expressions varying from that of worry to irritation. Words such as "Saintess", "Goddess", and even Aleric's name were thrown about frequently. As a result, I found no one ever dared to come close to me as they feared me too much over my new mark. It was even comical at times to see the lengths people were going to in order to stay away. For example, I'd decided to wait in line to buy something from the cafeteria one day and there was easily a two metre radius of empty space around me as if I were in a bubble. I had to remind myself that they were still children and their opinions didn't really matter. And whilst the teachers were at least more tactful, I could still sense their uneasiness. My plan for training had also begun almost immediately after I'd returned to my normal schedule. I'd told my parents that I was going to be studying in the library after school from now on but instead I was using the time to sneak into one of the old school gyms that were rarely used anymore.

I mostly hit and kicked at a punching bag, did push-ups and occasionally lifted weights, but I didn't really know what I was doing. And so, before long, I attempted to push myself beyond my physical limits. I assumed that if I was having to work harder to move, then my muscles would grow quickly to compensate. In the end, the results were slight, but I could feel I was easily fatigued. Having to push myself to train all afternoon and finish schoolwork until late at night, I could definitely begin to feel the tax it was taking on my body. Another two weeks passed since I started my extreme training and school had just finished for the day. I was excited as today I was going to attempt to add more weight to my weightlifting. Per normal, I gathered up my things and headed straight to the gym.

The gym was tiny which was part of the reason why no one used it anymore. There was also basically no equipment so many chose to use one of the newer facilities on the school grounds instead. This suited me perfectly as I preferred to not have an audience. I could definitely see how the little area had seen better days though, several cracks lining the walls and dust collecting in most areas. As I arrived at the gym, I could feel that my head was feeling especially dizzy already but I knew that results didn't come cheap. I strapped on my boxing gloves and began to punch at the bag with all my strength to warm up. However, after only five minutes of training, I was beginning to feel faint, my vision becoming obscured by black dots. But I pushed through it, forcing myself to keep going. Every time I felt like I was going to stop I would just picture Aleric and all the times he'd hurt me, all the pain I'd endured, and a small burst of energy would push me to keep going.

But then, suddenly, my hand missed the punching bag... and I could feel myself falling forward.

It was only at the last moment that I managed to throw my hands out, grabbing onto the bag to prevent my body from hitting the ground. I'd been merely seconds away from hurting myself.

"What the hell are you doing?!" a voice then yelled out from the entrance. I tried to look up but my vision was so blurred that it was hard to make out. "...Cai?" I asked wearily. "You stupid girl," he said, running up to my side to support my weight before I fell. "You're

going to kill yourself if you keep that up." He helped me walk to a nearby chair and sat me down, crouching in front of me.

"...Why are you here?" I asked.

"I followed you. It's not often that I cross paths with you, but I saw you walking to one of your classes today. You look sick, Aria."

I looked sick...? But I'd been training so much, I was getting stronger. Shouldn't I be looking healthier?

"You can't just ignore me for over a month and expect me not to notice you slowly destroying yourself. You've lost so much weight and become so pale. Honestly, I'm not even surprised you didn't see me today, you looked about ready to pass out in the hall. It seems it was a good idea to follow you. You need to stop this." "No... I'm training. I'm getting stronger," I argued feebly. "By pushing yourself this hard? You're going to hurt your body to the point of permanent damage if you keep that up."

I looked at him and saw his expression was furious. He was angry at me for doing something he thought was detrimental to myself. Just another thing to add to the 'feeling bad for me' friendliness,

But if Cai was saying that what I was doing was wrong, then didn't that mean it had to be true? Alpha heirs were trained from the moment they could walk. You wouldn't be able to find anyone else that would know what they're doing more than an Alpha. So, had I really been hurting myself that badly? He handed me a bottle of water and I drank from it, allowing myself to rest and clear my vision.

"I just... I don't know what I'm doing..." I admitted with defeat, unable to look him in the eye. "I couldn't ask my father and there was no one else to go to."

"No one else?" he asked, sounding a little offended. "If you hadn't been so busy avoiding me, you could have asked me to help, you silly girl."

...Asked Cai? The thought hadn't even crossed my mind. Someone like him would be way too busy to waste time training me.

"Aria," he said sternly so I'd look up at him. "Why are you avoiding me? Did I do something to upset you?"

"What? No!" I said immediately. "No, you didn't do anything. Of course not. It's just... I thought you were only being friendly because you pitied me over the whole Aleric thing." "What...? Why...?"

"Because before any of that happened, you told me that you wanted us to go our separate ways. It was the conversation we had just after the meeting with my Alpha. I just thought you were being too polite to tell me you didn't want to see me." "Arrghh," he said, rubbing his face with his hand. "No, I'm sorry. I was just momentarily

angry and said some dumb shit. I didn't mean it."

He hadn't meant it? Then that meant I'd been worrying over nothing the entire time. "Oh... okay..." I replied. "Um, I'm sorry for avoiding you." I wasn't sure what to do with this confession from him since, for over a month now, I'd been acting according to what I thought he wanted.

He smiled gently at me and stood up.

"Well, if I'm going to be training you then I think we need a fresh start, don't you think? Something to clear up the previous misconceptions and start anew." He held out his hand for me to shake it.

"Hello, Ariadne Chrysalis, daughter of the Beta from the Winter Mist, my name is Caius Knight, Alpha heir of the Silver Lake pack. It's nice to meet you." And, instantly, I could feel my entire body freeze over as I stared at his outstretched hand, unable to move. I couldn't believe the words he'd just spoken. There was no way this was real. Because it turns out that I actually knew who Cai was. In fact, I knew him extremely well. I knew him because in my past life... I'd killed him.

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Chapter Twenty-Four

"Caius... Knight...?" I could hear myself ask in a strained voice. I hadn't heard that name in an incredibly long time.

I'd tried so hard to forget it.

"Are you okay? You suddenly look really pale again. Are you still too weak from before?"

I couldn't hear him. Emotions were overcoming me. Guilt, shame, disbelief... regret.

Caius Knight, future Alpha of the Silver Lake pack, had risen to power after his father had been killed; or, more accurately, once he had been killed by Aleric. It was debatably one of the craziest political moves Aleric had ever done during his Alpha reign. It started with Caius' father, Tobias, who had managed to lead his pack up the ranks until their power was arguably on par with the Winter Mist. As such, negotiations were required to amend the terms of the alliance. Tobias came to our territory for a meeting with the intention of continuing the friendship between us... and he returned home without a head inside a body bag instead. I still never found out why Aleric had decided to act independently and without good reason to incite a war, but a war is what he indeed started. The only possible reasoning for his actions, that I ever managed to come up with, was that it had only been a few months since Aleric had become Alpha. He was wild with his newfound power and even the Elders were struggling to reign him in at that time. He seemed to be on a warpath and was determined to become the strongest pack in the country, refusing to listen to anyone

who tried to stop him. So, when Caius inevitably rose to power in place of his father, it became a battle between two new bloodthirsty Alphas, of which had two of the largest packs under their command. Both of them half-crazed for their own reasons, and both of them fighting for what they believed in.

The battle went on for many months without any one side gaining the upper hand over the other. Both of the packs appeared to be evenly matched and the morale of the people was waning. It looked as though the two would kill each other from exhaustion before any would emerge victorious.

The Elders, in particular, were becoming more concerned as they weren't able to think of any new ideas to win the war. They could clearly see the questionable flaws in what Aleric was doing but were helpless to stop him.

...Which is where I came in.

Aleric and I had been officially mated for just over a year by this point and I was madly in love with him. I would have done anything for him. One of the Elders called on me during a strategy meeting to give my opinion on the matter, feeling as though they were finally at rock bottom. I remember how Aleric had stared me down with an intense burning hatred the entire time I was in that room. I had thought it was just because he didn't think I was good enough. ...And so, I told them. I gave them a detailed play-by-play on exactly how they could win the war with minimal

casualties. It was that day I started my journey to become the country's best strategist. And it was the day I sold my soul just in the hopes Aleric would begin to love me. He gave me a single nod of acknowledgement once the war had been won and the Silver Lake pack were no more; including the death of their Alpha, Caius Knight. It was the first time Aleric had ever publicly acknowledged me, even though it was such a simple and insignificant gesture. I didn't care though.

From then on, the two of us won every battle we ever encountered. We were both high on the victories we earned; Aleric for the power we gained, myself for the small acknowledgements he would grant me. I kept telling myself that if we won the next battle then maybe, just maybe, he'd smile at me for once, or maybe even affectionately touch my shoulder if I was lucky. However, the next battle would come and go, and I would repeat the words in my head as if they were a mantra in my mind to justify why I should keep going. Three years later, when there was finally no more opposition left that posed as a threat, we stood atop the bodies of all we'd conquered. We were undefeated with our talents combined; Aleric for his unrivalled strength, and me for my unparalleled strategies. I turned to him for my normal small gesture of acknowledgement... only it never came. He swooped up Thea into his arms and shared the victory with her instead.

It all came quickly crashing down after that. I realised I'd been strung along the entire time when there hadn't been any real hope of us being together. I was young and naive.

Brilliant when it came to plans and war, but terrible when it had come to my judgment of Aleric. The weight of what I'd just done hit me very quickly after that.

It took a year before the names of the people I'd killed stopped haunting me every day. In reality, the names were only a fraction of the true number of lives that died because of me, I just never had the chance to learn the names of the innocent unranked who were caught up in the crossfire. And whether it was a blessing or a curse, I never saw the faces of those names that would come to me late at night. I had always worked from the confines of the packhouse, never having to venture out to the battlefield myself. Never having to see the real damage I was capable of causing.

It was a memory I never wanted to relive, buried under years of trying to suppress the sins I'd committed by ignorance. Caius had been the first in a long journey of horrible mistakes. A name that I had long since hidden away. And by some messed up fate, he had now been brought to me in the form of an ally, of someone who had shown me compassion.

How could he be so kind to someone like me? If this wasn't divine intervention to punish me for my previous blind faith, then I didn't know what else to call it.

"Aria?" he called out to me, worried.

It snapped me back to reality as I looked up at him. However, as soon as I met his pure golden eyes, I had to look away. I couldn't bear to face him for what I'd done. He'd only retaliated due to an injustice that had been started by Aleric... and one that I had ended with his death. "I'm so sorry..." I whispered. "What...? 'Sorry? What for?" he asked confused. "For not feeling well? You don't need to apologise for that."

He came closer and was about to touch my shoulder but I flinched away. "Aria? Talk to me. Are you about to pass out or something?"

"No... I just... I-I can't." "That's it," he said and moved towards me. "I'm taking you to the hospital right now." "No! Don't touch me." I moved my body but I was too slow. He grabbed me and tried to lift me up.

And that's when it happened.

Just like what had happened with Myra, my vision suddenly blurred and I was transported away. No longer was I in the gym... but somewhere completely new.

I looked around at the empty plain in front of me and tried to come to terms with what had just happened. In the distance, I could see a treeline of a forest that surrounded the open space, making it almost feel like an arena. However, unlike last time, I found I was able to move. And so, I began to walk around.

Before I could get very far though, a loud growl suddenly ripped through the air behind me and I turned immediately towards the source. There, several feet away from me, I could see that a large black wolf was bent over a figure lying on the ground. A cold sense of dread quickly hit my heart as I realised what I might be seeing. I approached slowly, having to force myself to keep moving. Because I needed to see, to confirm that it was what I thought it was, but every part of me wanted to turn back with every step I took, I could feel my legs becoming more numb.

The black wolf then turned around and began to walk away in my direction, its snout covered in a thick liquid I instinctively knew was blood. But I did my best to not inspect too closely as w

ssed paths, thankful that he never turned in my direction as I moved by.

I recognised the same feeling of being invisible to the people inside the vision, just as I had been last time. I knew I was a spectator, not a participant. I wasn't meant to be seeing this, I wasn't meant to be here when this had happened. And yet, I was being forced to see it anyway.

I was being made to witness the outcome of my handiwork.

'Please don't make me watch this. Please...', I whimpered inside my head. 'I'm already sorry for what I did.'

With tears in my eyes, I stared down at the body of Cai, his hands feebly trying to apply pressure to a wound at his neck. There was no hope though. I didn't need to be a doctor to see that the injury he had would be fatal. I knelt beside him, watching as he spluttered blood out in an attempt to breathe, and I began to gently stroke his hair. I knew this wasn't real but I found the movement helped my sorrow somehow.

He looked older, more mature. He had the same incredibly strange coloured irises but his hair was shorter, and now more dishevelled. Under his eyes, I could see dark circles that looked to have been built up over a long period of time. I was sure it was brought on by the immense amount of pressure he'd been under during the many months of war.

This is what I had done to him. This was his fate. To die alone in a field, struggling to breathe, while the world carried on without him. A face I'd never met, but one I would now never be able to forget.

"I'm so sorry," I cried, my tears falling on to him. "I'm so sorry...."

He coughed once more and I could feel he was becoming weaker. He didn't have long left. I grabbed one of his hands in both of mine and brought it up to my face, sobbing into it. "I didn't know, I didn't understand. I'm here now though. I'm so sorry." Suddenly, I

felt his hand move out of my mine as he cupped my cheek, my eyes instantly snapping towards his face in response. But, to my utter shock... ..I found him staring right at me.

A Gift from the Goddess by Dawn Rosewood Chapter 25

Chapter Twenty-Five

His shining eyes stared directly at me and I had to fight the urge to look behind to see if someone else was standing there. But no, I could feel the touch of his hand against my cheek, even the warmth emanating off his skin. This was real, he could see me.

“Aria...,” he said weakly.

“I’m here,” I replied.

I wasn’t sure how to react. I was still unnerved by the whole situation. All I could do was stare down at him confused and uncertain. Was this part of the vision or had something changed? “...Aria,” he called again. “Cai? Can you see me?”

I wrapped my fingers around the hand he was using to touch my cheek Maybe he was too weak to see me.

“.Aria.”

I frowned at him. It was starting to feel more than just being unable to see me as he persisted i n trying to call out for me.

“Can’t you hear me? I’m right here.”

His eyes continued to bore into mine intensely before, finally, it was like he saw me. I watched as his expression changed to one of worry.

How could he be worried about me? He was the one who was dying.

“Aria... wake up.” “What...?”

Wake... up?

Suddenly my vision evaporated, and I was looking up at Cai, his concerned face close to mine a s he was bent over my body. It was just like in my vision, I could feel his hand was on my cheek as a few tears had escaped my eyes. Had he actually not seen me as held laid dying then? Was it just a mesh of the two realities as they transitioned? It had already been a frightening ordeal having to confront him like that without the added fourth wall breaking.

“Aria?” he asked, seeing that I was becoming more alert. It was too much. All of it. My already weak body, the news of a ghost coming back to haunt me... and then having to witness it for myself. I couldn’t do this anymore. I reached up and wrapped my arms around his torso, pulling him down towards me. He had to act quickly to use his arms to support himself so he didn’t completely crush me during the sudden embrace. I didn’t care though. He couldn’t have broken every bone in my body and it still wouldn’t have been enough. I cried into his chest, unable to process everything that had just happened. This gift was

becoming more like a curse every day. Had it really been necessary to be shown all of that? Caius Knight would die at the age of twenty-one with no Luna, mate or child. I already knew that was his fate if nothing were to change, I didn’t need to be reminded. This wasn’t like Myra where being able to see it happen in a vision had a real benefit. This felt more like I was being reprimanded.

When I’d finally calmed down, I released my grip on him, allowing for us both to sit up. My eyes were painfully sore and puffy, my body ached still from the training.

“I’m sorry...,” I mumbled.

“Yeah, you might have mentioned that already once or twice... or ten times,” he joked.

I couldn’t reciprocate the joking half-smile he gave me though.

“Aria, you need to tell me what the hell I just saw because I’m really confused.” He sat down with his back against the wall and drank from my water bottle. I could see a small frown on his face as he was trying to process the situation. “Is this like a medical condition you have? It was if you were asleep... except your eyes were open the whole time.” I shook my head. “I’m fine now, really. I’m sorry for worrying you.” I did my best to give him the best reassuring smile I could manage. “Aria! Enough,” he suddenly said loudly, a tone of annoyance in his words. “You’re clearly not fine. Stop feeding me that same bullshit line. You weren’t fine with Aleric and you’re not fine with whatever hell that was. If you don’t tell me then I’m marching you to your mum right now and telling her exactly what I saw.”

My face paled. If he took me to my mother then she would lock me up in the hospital for a few days in order to conduct extensive tests. And I could see I’d upset Cai, my chest tightening with the guilt of seeing him like that. He was worried and wanted to know what was wrong. I owed him at least some sort of explanation.

I took a deep breath. “It’s the Goddess mark,” I said slowly. “It shows me... nightmares sometimes.”

“Nightmares...? Like what?” “L... I see...,” my voice trailed off. A flash of Cai’s dying face came to mind and I shuddered. I couldn’t tell him. If I told them

then I would need to explain my rebirth and it was something I wasn't ready to talk about with anyone.

But even if I did tell him about my past life, how could I even begin to explain what I'd seen? 'O h, by the way, Cai, I saw your death. Sorry about that. It was my bad? I'd either sound completely insane or, if he did somehow believe me, he would probably not want to be around me anymore.

"...I'm not ready to talk about it," I said finally. "I really am sorry. I hope that this will be enough explanation for now."

He looked uneasy and I could tell he wanted to ask me more questions. "Just... believe me when I tell you... I feel like this Goddess mark is shaping up to be more pain potem than it's worth."

It had only made things more difficult. I was living with visions of graphic murders and was now having to fight harder for my right to be left alone. Not to mention that, if I somehow didn't get assassinated by someone before my coming of age, then it would need to be classed as a miracle. This mark prevented me from ever being able to run away or even to live a peaceful life.

Cai was reluctant but he finally agreed to leave it at that for now, having realised that I wasn't medically ill at least.

After we had finished talking, Cai helped me get back home and we agreed on a new training schedule. He had banned me from any physical exercise for at least a week to allow my body to recover some of the damage I'd already done, and he had even given me a new strict diet plan. I gave it to the cook at my house and told them to keep it quiet from my parents in exchange for a pay rise. Finally, a few days into my mandatory bed rest week, I was upstairs in my room when a small knock came from the door. "Come in!" I called out.

The door opened slowly and an uneasy looking Lucy came walking in. I was confused about what she needed at first before I finally realised the date. I couldn't believe I'd almost forgotten.

"Sorry for the interruption, Miss. I've finished organising most of the things you've asked for," she said and handed me a manilla folder.

I opened it up and had a look Inside contained an array of information from a fake alias, bank account details, financial estimates, to even the details for a private investigator. The PI looked to be qualified and came at the recommendation of a neighbouring pack who had used them in several large cases with a huge success rate.

I smiled at Lucy and was genuinely really pleased with all the work she'd done. She only returned my smile with a look of concern. "The PI is expecting half payment upfront...", she said nervously, unsure if this news would upset me.

"That's fine!" I said cheerily and could see her relax a little. "I actually have an errand for you to run so he can expect payment within the next two weeks or so."

I turned to the side and started sifting through a few documents in my drawer until I found an envelope I'd carefully prepared earlier. I handed it to Lucy. "You'll need to use a third party you can trust for this task. Also, make sure they hold no ties to the Winter Mist that can be traced back to you or me."

"Miss?" she asked, tensing up again.

I ignored her distress and kept going with the details. "This letter needs to be delivered to Alpha Raymond Sullivan of the Hidden Moon pack directly. It is for his eyes only. Please ensure it is sent urgently as this is a time crucial errand."

"Who is that? I've never even heard of them."

"They're a large pack to the far east so I wouldn't expect you to know them," I explained. "They're actually quite wealthy."

She frowned. "So, are you planning on asking them for money, Miss?"

I laughed. "Don't be ridiculous. As if they'd just hand over free money."

"... Then what..." Her words trailed off in thought.

I smiled brightly at her, which only seemed to worry her more. "I'm going to blackmail them of course."