

A Gift from the Goddess by Dawn Rosewood Chapter 7

The last piece of hope I had inside me died at her words.

Sophie had betrayed me, thrown me out and lied blatantly to everyone. How could she do this to me after everything we'd been through? I had loved her so much, trusted her implicitly, and yet she was now acting as if I meant nothing to her.

Sophie's eyes began to fill with tears as her voice wavered into the crowd.

"Ariadne had been distraught by the news of Miss Woods' pregnancy and I saw how this began to erode at her sanity; something I'd seen was already dwindling prior. Whilst in her employment, I saw her experience several fits of hysteria, laughing at the most horrible of things. And her mood swings were even worse. Sometimes she was so sweet, other times she would change like a light switch, become irritable and angry without warning."

I couldn't believe what I was hearing. She was taking one small incident and magnifying it, warping it with more lies to suit the agenda. Had she really disliked me this much the whole time?

"She persuaded me to try and escape with her, but I know now she didn't tell me the whole story. I thought I was going to be helping a poor girl who needed someone to care for her. Instead, I ended up aiding a criminal with something so heinous."

She turned her teary eyes to Thea, crying during her words.

"Miss Woods... I don't know how you could ever forgive me, but I truly did not mean you any harm. I believed that I was bringing you a peace offering from Ariadne that day, not dosing you with the death of your child. I thought she wanted to make amends one final time before we left. I was wrong... so wrong... I am so sorry..."

Her voice broke off into sobs as the crowd was whispering among themselves. They all believed her. They believed every lie she was telling.

And there was nothing I could do.

Thea suddenly stood up and everyone became silent to watch, anticipating a violent scene towards the woman who had poisoned her. Her walk was shaky and unsteady as she strode up to Sophie, as if to emphasise on her recent hospitalisation. However, to everyone's surprise, when she finally reached Sophie, she engulfed her in a hug instead. They hugged as if they'd known each other as good friends.

When Thea eventually broke away, she smiled benevolently up at the older woman, grasping Sophie's hands in her own.

“...I forgive you, Sophie,” Thea said, making a show of her mercy. “I can hear your words ring true under the light of the Goddess here tonight. I know you did not mean me or my baby any harm, and so I can’t blame you for the sins of your superior.”

I looked out into the crowd to see they were enamoured by everything she was saying. They were hanging on her every word, their faces full of admiration for her.

“This may be too soon to announce, but...,” she looked towards Aleric who was just as enchanted at everything she was doing. He gave her a nod of approval for whatever she had been silently seeking permission for, and she smiled brilliantly back at him.

“...But Alec and I have been talking and he wishes for me to step up as Luna once all this unpleasantness is behind us. I see how pure and loyal your heart is, Sophie. I see how deeply you care for others. I know the Goddess must feel the same.”

I could see what she was doing now. They had some sort of deal, I was sure of it. Sophie’s co-operation and false testimony in exchange for her freedom post-trial. Calling her by Aleric’s nickname “Alec” was also another power move. It showed everyone how close they were. No one had called him by that name publicly since his father had died. This was all a charade to win the hearts of the pack, to make them look up to her as though she was a merciful saint.

And I was the devil, a baby killer, a murderer.

“Sophie, I may not be this pack’s Luna yet, but I would love it if you would attend to me, showing me the same loyalty and love you mistakenly entrusted to the wrong person.”

Sophie bent her knee immediately and kissed her hand, bowing her head in respect.

“Miss Woods... no, Luna... it would be my greatest honour to serve you and spend the rest of my old life atoning for my mistakes.”

Thea smiled and brought Sophie to her feet, hugging her once more. The crowd instantly erupted in applause at the scene they had just witnessed. Their new soon-to-be Luna had shown great love and forgiveness to the person who admitted to poisoning her. She was beautiful, kind, and strong. I knew they had never felt those things about me. I had always held their respect, but never their adoration.

“I think we’ve seen enough,” Aleric said gently, standing back up.

He walked up to Thea and wrapped an arm around her possessively. But it was then that I saw it.

Something that made my blood boil.

During their embrace, Thea flicked her hair back. It was strategic, I was sure. She wanted me to see. Wanted me to feel the pain it would cause one last time before my conviction.

Because there, on her neck, was Aleric's mark. Something he had never given me. Something he had always refused me even after we'd mated. He had marked Thea as his own, showing the world his favour for her. And it had only taken him a week, wasting no time to take her as a chosen mate.

I was angry, furious. The mate bond was broken so I was no longer forced to love him, but to think I begged him to mark me for years without him wavering, only to see him mark her within a week. Disgusting.

I hated him. I hated Thea. I hated this pack. I hated Sophie.

Yes, Sophie, I hated her the most. I knew what was coming next, Aleric didn't even need to say it. It was all because of Sophie. Her false testimony was the final nail in my coffin.

It was my mistake in loving them; her and Aleric both. I had given everything to them and it had turned to poison against me. Was this always my destiny? Was I fated to live and die as only a means to help the pack? They had their mighty leader now, their loving Luna, and a pack that became successful off my own hard work and dedication. There was no room for me in the picture anymore. I wasn't needed.

"I think the evidence here has weighed in an obvious result. Do you have anything to say in your defence, Ariadne?" Aleric asked.

I cleared my mind and took a deep breath to calm myself. There was no point in trying to dispute the allegations anymore. There was nothing I could do nor say that would change their minds.

And so, I spoke the only words I could think of. The honest words I felt deep inside.

"...I sincerely hope the Goddess smites you all for the murder of an innocent you are about to carry out," I said bitterly. "There is nothing I can do anymore to prove myself not guilty against the stacks of false evidence you have brought forward, but deep down... I hope you all suffer. When I am gone and you are alone, I hope I haunt you. I hope my face is what you see when you finally meet your demise. My only mistake was in loving someone."

There was only silence.

No one spoke, no one moved. I don't think anyone had expected me to say something so intense. They had probably assumed I was going to cry and beg for forgiveness from

Thea like Sophie had. But I refused to bow to that bitch. Take my head, but you'd have to cut my legs off before I'd ever be seen prostrated to her.

I turned to look at her and, to my surprise, she looked straight back at me amused, a smirk on her face. She didn't look like the lost ditzzy girl I'd known over the years. No, there was a strange intelligence that showed through them now. She looked at me as if she knew all along this would be the outcome.

She looked at me as her true self for the first time.

I realised then that she had planned all of this from the start. My isolation, Aleric, Sophie... who knew what else. She had pretended to be clueless so no one ever suspected her. And with a revolting realisation, I wondered if she'd even killed her own unborn baby for the sake of my Luna position. Or was she never pregnant to start with? I prayed it was the latter.

Aleric cleared his throat bringing everyone's attention back to him. "Very well. In accordance with the correct procedure, the ranked members and elders will now vote." He turned his attention to the members behind him. "Will all who find Ariadne Chrysalis guilty of the murder of the alpha heir, and for the intended harm to Thea Woods, please stand up?"

The result looked unanimous. I watched in horror as one after the other they all stood, their faces bearing down on me. I checked the rows of members and my eyes eventually caught one pair who were staring at me intently. Elder Luke. He was... seated.

"Elder Luke?" Aleric asked, pointing out he was the only person not standing.

He looked indifferent, uncaring as to whether he was singled out or not.

"I don't believe she did it. It seems like a possible frame job to me and most of the evidence was circumstantial at best," he said, his voice unwavering and confident. "The former Luna is right. I don't wish to see her face haunt me by convicting her to this death. You might all be complacent but I will not sell my soul for the sake of popularity."

Whispers of shocked remarks scattered through the crowd as everyone couldn't believe someone didn't find me guilty. Aleric seemed angry that someone had voted against the majority, though he tried to hide it well.

"No matter," Aleric said, his voice tight. "We hold the majority vote here to proceed. Please bring me the broadsword."

He indicated towards a random attendant to the side and they quickly began to unbox the weapon. The sword was mostly ornate considering it wasn't used for proper combat.

The hilt comprised of several blue and white jewels and carvings related to the moon. I would have found it beautiful if it weren't for what it was about to do.

Aleric grabbed the sword tightly and inspected it to ensure it was still sharp. The edge gleamed towards me as if begging to come closer, to greet it. And when he was satisfied with its condition he turned to me, his eyes as sharp as the sword.

This was it. This was the end. Everything had been for nothing. What a bitter, sad life I had led. So empty... so lonely.

"You have been found guilty of the charges against you. The murder of the Alpha heir and harm to another pack member carry the harshest sentence," Aleric started.

"Therefore, with the power held within me, I, Aleric Dumont, Alpha of the Winter Mist Pack, sentence you, Ariadne Chrysalis, former Luna of the Winter Mist Pack, to death. Your sentence is to be carried out immediately."

I didn't want to be scared but I was. As every step closer Aleric took towards me, the more I wanted to run. I wanted it more than anything.

Why had I waited so long before trying to escape? This man had been my death sentence long before now but I had been too blind to see it.

With shaky legs, I then knelt before the wooden stump. I didn't need to be pushed or shoved, instead I willingly placed my head on the block and closed my eyes, waiting.

I felt like I couldn't breathe, tears beginning to fall down my cheeks. How naive I'd been. How stupid. I'd built myself to be one of the smartest people in the country, but in the end, it seemed I was the densest.

I felt the air then shift, the faintest sound of the sword swinging...

...And then there was darkness.