

Accidental Surrogate For Alpha By Caroline Above Chapter 111

Ella

“Cora tell me what happened.” I demand, crossing my skinny arms over my chest. I’m eight years old, glaring down at my surrogate sister with a stern expression. It’s

always been this way between us.

She’s a year older, but I’ve always had the dominant personality.

“It was nothing.” She insists, averting her gaze from my own.

“You’re lying.” I counter stubbornly. “I can always tell, you know.”

“No, you think you always know.” Cora answers sullenly, though we both know I’m

right. I can read my sister like a book.

“Would you just tell me?” I press, sighing with exasperation.

“Fine, it’s not even a big deal, it was just some of the big kids being jerks.” She explains gravely.

“Which ones?” I respond immediately. “Point them out.” It could be anyone,

considering the fact that even children our own age tend to be bigger than us. It

seems like the orphanage physician labels us undersized and undernourished every year, though nothing ever changes.

Reluctantly, Cora points toward a familiar gang of kids, ranging from age eleven to

fourteen. The ringleader is a beefy thirteen year old who always wears a cruel leer as

if he’s ever on the lookout for someone to bully to tears – just for the fun of it. “

You see, there’s nothing we can do about it- they run this place.”

“I beg to differ.” I answer, tilting my chin up defiantly. “We don’t have to be bigger than

them just smarter. Now tell me what they said to you?”

Cora's voice is so low I almost can't hear her speak. She stares at the ground, her shoulders slumped in defeat. "They called me a worthless gutter rat and said no one would ever adopt me cuz I'm too ugly."

Protective fury boils up inside of me. This is the weak spot for any abandoned child. None of us know what it's like to be wanted or unconditionally loved, and the only thing that keeps us going is the hope that we might get parents one day. As far as I'm concerned, targeting my sister's biggest sensitivity deserves a serious punishment.

"I'll kill them." I seethe, my tiny hands closing into fists.

"Ella no."

"Cora argues, completely disheartened. "I mean, maybe they have a point. We're getting old now, and you know how it is. Parents only ever want the babies. I mean you might have a chance – you're so pretty... but I have to be realistic."

"Cora, I want parents just as badly as you do, but I'm not gonna leave you for anything." I vow. I'd like to see any grown up try to take me away from the orphanage without her. "We're sisters."

"It's easy for you to say that." Cora offers me a hesitant smile. "You adopt all the outcasts." This isn't the first time she's said this to me. I do have a way of taking the most skittish and rejected of our peers under my wing, but it's not as if I can just stand by and let them be mistreated, or leave them to fend for themselves. We all need each other.

“Everyone here is an outcast.” I remind her. “Why else do you think the big kids are so mean. They’re mad that no one ever picked them and they take it out on us cuz they think we might still have a chance.”

“Does that mean you’re going to let them off them hook?” She asks, arching a brow.

“Of course not, I’m just gonna remind them that we’re in this together.” I answer reasonably, trying to calm my own ire.

Cora’s teeth flash in a pearly grin. “And if they don’t listen?”

“Then I’ll kick them in the pants.” I sniff, turning on my heels to march up to the bullies in question.

Cora trails along behind me, whispering anxiously about what a bad idea this is. I

don’t listen, determined to defend her no matter the odds.

“Hey you, didn’t anyone ever teach you to pick on someone your own size?” I call while we’re still a few meters away.

The older children turn around, then laugh when they see I’m the one who spoke. The ringleader rises to his feet, then scoffs, “Even if they did, that ain’t you, pipsqueak.”

“It is if you account for brains.” I bite back. “You shouldn’t be mean to Cora just cuz you’re unhappy.

That isn’t fair and she doesn’t deserve it.”

“Oh yeah, and what are you gonna do about it, brat?” He stalks forward, looming over my small body with malicious intent. “A scrawny little thing like you? You’re even more useless than she is.”

He reaches out and shoves me, both of his hands slamming into my shoulders.

At first I stumble back, but something is rising up inside me, something powerful and fearless. I snarl and pounce, scrabbling up the older boy's body and attacking him tooth and nail, He screams and flails his arms. "What – hey! Get her off me!

What is this!" I don't relent. Hands grab for me, but I dig my nails into his flesh, biting and scratching with all my strength.

As I come back to the present, I realize how strange my behavior had been that day.

Normal human girls don't act like that – do they?

"You did that?" Sinclair asks, the corners of his mouth quirking upwards.

I nod, "The way Cora tells it, that's the day I became the de facto leader of the

orphanage, just by being scrappy enough to take on the big kids. When it was over I

tended his wounds, and from then on they were all loyal to me. My own little gang."

"You made your own pack." Sinclair observes, massaging my tense shoulders. His

words sink into my mind slowly, but I gradually recognize the truth in them – not only

the wolfish group I formed, but the fact I was able to wrangle the other children in the

first place.

"It all makes sense now." I muse aloud. "I was able to beat him because I'm a wolf.. I

mean I'm sure I wouldn't have been any match for a pup that wasn't dormant, but the

human kids still weren't as strong. I never understood how I won before."

"Strength isn't everything – from the sounds of it you were a born leader, and that has

nothing to do with being a wolf – not alone at least.” He praises, dipping his head to deposit a few lingering kisses on my neck. “My fierce Ella.” “Yeah well, that was before.” I answer, my voice taking on a hollow quality I hate.

Y”Before what?” Sinclair questions, his huge body going still beside mine.

I shrug. “It was easy to be fierce before I knew how much there was in the world to fear.” I share hesitantly. “I didn’t know how much worse it could get back then. It reached a point where I couldn’t protect the other kids anymore.” I confess. “Or myself..”

I’m fidgeting now, unable to look Sinclair in the eye. “What Cora said about me being pretty... she didn’t come up with that on her own. She was just repeating what she heard from the grown ups. I mean, I know that’s not why.. ” I’m stumbling over my words now, changing tracks and not making any sense, but I can’t help it. “I know those things happen to lots of girls no matter what they look like.. but it’s what they always said when...” I shake my head, unable to finish the thought.

Unwanted images are flashing through my vision, and I force them away before they can consume me completely. A new thought occurs to me then, a revelation I hadn’t been able to focus on earlier, but which now makes our circumstances seem even more surreal. “Dominic, I’m not sure we’re on the right path with all this. I don’t think anyone was keeping track of me after I was given to the humans.”

“Why do you say that?” He inquires curiously, only seeming willing to be distracted because this is so important.

“Because if they’d been watching me... then they would have known everything that was going on in the orphan age.” I explain, “And I can’t believe they would have just stood by and let those things happen to a child they cared about.” Sinclair is up on his elbow, looking down at me with a furrowed brow. His powerful hands are stroking my side, but I think he knows there isn’t anything he can do to make this better. “What things, sweetheart?”

I take a deep breath, but it comes out shaky and weak. I clench my eyes shut, and a stray tear escapes. “Im sorry, I don’t think I can do this.”

“You don’t have to if you aren’t ready, Ella.” He cuddles me closer, and I hiccup in thanks. “We’re going to get to the bottom of this. But for now, I’m here and you’re safe. I’m not going to let anything hurt you ever again.”

I lean into his warmth, stunned to realize I believe him. Even though the Prince and all his henchmen are out to kill me, I feel completely secure with Sinclair, and that’s not a feeling I ever expected to experience with any man. I’m overflowing with love as I smile up at the huge Alpha, “I know.”

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Ella

“Sometimes it amazes me that I can even be with you this way.” I tell Sinclair, nuzzling his shoulder.

We're still in his bed, and I'm not fully recovered from our conversation yet. I'm beginning to think a hypnotist might truly be necessary in order to open the doors to my past, but for right now I'm merely thrilled to revel in the heady glow of our love nest. "I learned to trust Mike with my body – but I could never tell him any of this... then again, he wouldn't have wanted to know." Sinclair purrs, "Well if you hadn't already figured it out, I think it's fair to say you've made a serious upgrade from that weasel." "oh I know it" I reply, my head whirling with emotions. I still feel a bit fragile, but I'm also aching to feel close to Sinclair. I need to feel his steady strength, and I want to stop dwelling in the past. I want to make new memories with this man – good memories to replace all the bad ones hanging over my head. "You are better in every way, Dominic." I tell him in a sultry tone, moving to straddle his waist. Sinclair chuckles, running his hands up my thighs and underneath the hem of my night dress, settling on my hips "Are you trying to seduce me, trouble?" "Im just curious to see if reality can live up to my dreams." I shrug, trying not to feel too embarrassed by my brazen behavior. "You know, that was the first time I've ever had an orgasm I didn't give myself." "Oh really?" His pupils dilate, black pools slowly eating up his emerald irises. "You really weren't kidding about Mike's shortcomings." I bite my lip and shake my head, lowering my body to his until the tips of my breasts graze his muscular chest. "And I haven't even experienced it for real

yet.”

Sinclair groans, his fists compulsively squeezing my bare skin. “Baby, we’ve been

over this. If we start this, I won’t be able to stop.”

“Start what?” I inquire innocently, kissing his neck as I deftly unbutton his shirt. Inch

after inch of his contoured abs appear, dusted with a swath of dark hair. I slide my

palms over the hard planes, pushing the fabric of his clothing out of the way. I nibble

his jaw and lean up to press my lips to his, but before I succeed I find myself flipped

onto my back. Suddenly the massive Alpha is hovering over me, his eyes glowing with untamed desire.

“Ella, we can’t.” He insists, but the words are dragged out of him in a ragged growl. “If

I claim you it might wake your wolf.”

That was a mistake. The moment he mentions claiming me, the little voice in my head

goes wild, Oh yes, please. My wolf begs. I need to be his. I need his mark.

She’s not the only one; suddenly all I can think about is Sinclair sinking his teeth into

that special spot. I need to feel that one-ness with him, the white light which burst in

my soul at the height of our shared dream. I was already turned on, but now my desire

skyrockets. I’m going wild with need for him, and all other thoughts have disappeared.

Make him claim us! I’ll go crazy if he doesn’t.

“But we don’t know that it will. There’s only a chance, right?” I suggest.

It’s not that I

don’t care about the risk to my baby, it’s simply that this need has knocked all the logic

out of my head.

The doctor was only guessing – no one really knows how this all works.” I press, reaching for him again. Sinclair promptly catches my wrists and pins them above my

head. I’m completely immobilized, which I would have expected to frighten me or trigger a panic attack, instead it fills me with a sense of utter safety. I peek up at him from beneath my lashes, “don’t you want to?”

“Goddess Ella, I already want to claim you so badly it’s killing me.” He rumbles, sounding as though he’s barely hanging onto his control. “Please don’t make this

harder than it has to be. The risks are too great.” His sharp eyes are piercing straight through me, and his raw power is washing over me in waves, urging me to submit

even as it fuels my lust. “Make no mistake, I can’t wait for your wolf to emerge, but not at the cost of the baby.”

My lower lip begins to quiver as I realize I’m truly playing with fire. No, not the baby.

We can’t hurt the baby. My wolf insists, sounding more conflicted than I’ve ever heard her. Rafe, my Rafe.

The horrible thing is that, as guilty as I feel about potentially endangering my unborn child, I’m still positively squirming with need.

“I don’t want to hurt him either.” I tell Sinclair, my voice a mere squeak. “I know, little one.” Sinclair assures me, “I never thought you did. It’s just your

instincts. I’m afraid that dream was a blessing and a curse – we know what you are

now, but your wolf is also fighting harder to come out now that she’s

tasted freedom.

She's going to push us both, Ella."

"So what do we do?" I ask anxiously. "How do I keep her at bay?"

A low growl sounds in my head, and I realize the predator in question does not

appreciate this suggestion. Oh hush. I scold her, you're not helping things.

"I'll help you." Sinclair promises, flashing his fangs at me in a way that's both ravenous

and reassuring. "I'll give you the relief you need, and if your wolf pushes me to claim

her, I'll remind her who's in charge here." His dark promise sends a delicious shiver

down my spine, but Sinclair is still speaking low in my ear. "It's the most natural thing

in the world that she wants my mark, but it's my mark to give, not hers to take."

I writhe in his arms, whimpering pitifully. When I speak, it's as if the voice in my head

is speaking out of my own mouth. "But I want it."

"And I'll give it to you when the time is right, mate." Sinclair purrs, his husky tones

vibrating through my body with utmost authority. This isn't the first time I've felt as

though I'm speaking directly to his wolf, but it is the first time I've experienced my own

inner animal taking over in response.

I arch my back, pressing up against him, and wind my legs around his waist, rocking

my hips up towards his hardness. He growls, but I extend my neck, showing off the

slender column and all but begging for his bite. I don't even recognize myself in this

moment: I'm feral and wanton, and I don't even care.

"Keep it up, Ella." He warns, shackling both of my wrists in one of his

large hands so
that the other can glide down and close over my undulating bottom.
“And you’re going
to get yourself a punishment instead of a reward.”
The creature inside me isn’t sure which she would prefer. I remember
how incredible it
felt to be dominated so completely by Sinclair. Another mystery
explained: of course I
enjoyed him taking control that way – since it’s exactly what she-
wolves need from
their mates. Still, right now the word reward is far more tempting.
Sinclair has made it
clear he isn’t going to cave, so I can keep pushing him and earn another
demonstration of his power, or I can just let him make me feel good.
Sinclair’s expression softens as he watches me deliberate, but only just.
“You’re going
to have plenty of chances to rebel in the future, mate.
Tonight, let’s just be together.”
“You’re really going to make me wait until after the baby arrives?” I
clarify, sounding
horrified. “When my body will be a disaster zone and we’ll be
completely sleep-
deprived, not to mention have a kingdom to run?”
“We’ll manage it, Ella. You’ll see.” Sinclair vows, softening his hold on
my body, and
pressing a lingering kiss to my lips.
When we part I can only gaze up at him with liquid eyes. “And in the
meantime?” I ask
hopefully, thinking again of his promised reward. Please let that mean
he’s going to
touch me!
He chuckles, glancing at the bedding around us.
In the meantime, you’re not the only one who wants to see if reality lives
up to
dreams.” He rears up, stripping off my flimsy night dress and sliding my

body up onto
the pillows. “I think it’s long past time that I taste you again.” As he
settles between my
legs, hooking his arms beneath my thighs and lowering his mouth to my
aching clit, he
pauses to give me a final, wolfish grin. “Try not to get too wild, my love
– we wouldn’t
want to destroy the nest”
At first think he’s exaggerating, after all – if he’s only going to pleasure
me and we’re
not actually going to make love- how rambunctious can things get? But
in the end he
proved me wrong – we had to remake the nest.

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Sinclair

When I wake, it’s to the feeling of Ella’s round bottom undulating
against my hard
cock. Her back is flush to my chest, her naked body perfectly cushioned
by my much
larger form on one side, and the boundary of her nest on the other. I have
no doubt
I was already swollen with arousal when she roused, as sleeping beside
her every
night is an ever-increasing challenge, especially now that our
relationship has become
overtly romantic. I fell asleep with her honeyed nectar still lingering on
my tongue,
after yet another session of pleasuring Ella unconscious to try and pacify
her wolf.
I open my eyes, tightening my arms on the sweet bundle and trying to
silence the
excited growls of my wolf. Such a needy little mate. He’s crooning.

My Ella. Mine, mine, mine. It hasn't escaped his notice that my mouth is mere inches away from her lovely neck. So close, it would be so easy, so simply. Just one little bite.

I rumble in sympathy, pressing my lips to that special juncture where her shoulder curves up into the graceful column of her throat, but forcing myself to go no further.

This is my consolation prize. I can kiss her claiming spot all I want, I can even give it the "updated by jobnib.com" occasional nibble. maybe a frequent nibble... or a little nip.. just a tiny baby bite... NO! I quickly break myself out of the reverie, cursing Ella's delicious scent.

This is torture. My wolf complains. I can't believe the Goddess would send us a mate

then refuse us the ability to claim her. It's sadistic – criminal even! Ella, for her part, isn't making the situation any easier. The naughty creature is still

rubbing her bottom suggestively against me, but she's also pretending to be asleep.

She's taking determinedly even breaths, much too intentional and heavy to compare to the gentle sighs of her usual dozing.

I've spent much more time than I'd like to admit watching this little wolf sleep, and I

know an act when I see it. The nerve, I think in complete amusement. As if all her

rocking and wriggling is just tossing and turning, and not a calculated assault.

"I know you're awake, trouble." I purr in her ear, quickly rewarded with a small giggle.

Chuckling myself, I prop myself onto and elbow and roll Ella onto her back, both

relieved and disappointed to lose the stimulation of her lush behind. I duck my head and claim her lips, dragging my palm down to her swollen breast as I steal the breath from her lungs. Ella moans and arches into my hand, and I drag my thumb over her beaded nipple. We carry on this way for a while, saying good morning with our bodies instead of our voices, and enjoying every last moment.

When I finally pull back, bumping her pert nose with my own, I fall headfirst into the bottomless pools of her golden eyes. “Well, imp? What do you have to say for yourself?”

“It wasn’t my fault.” The brazen thing actually bats her eyelashes at me, the very picture of innocence.

“I woke up and it was practically stabbing me, what else was I supposed to do?”

In hindsight I realize she might have done much worse. If I woke up first and found

Ella aroused, there are about a dozen different and completely debauched ways I would have chosen to wake her.

The possibilities are already racing through my mind: images of Ella splayed before me, whimpering in her sleep, coming before she even – Get your mind out of the gutter!

“You were supposed to wake me up so I could get things under control – not try to

seduce me.” I grin, flashing my fangs so she knows I’m only half joking. Ella drops her head back and groans. “It isn’t fair.”

She complains, “you get to touch me all you want, and I never get to return the favor!”

“Because I don’t trust myself not to lose control.” I remind her for the tenth time, already anticipating her usual rebuttal of: but you’re always in control. “All bets are off when it comes to you, Elia.”

Ella huffs, but peeks up at me curiously, “I was thinking.” She begins hesitantly, her slender fingers toying with the dark hair scattered over my chest. “Mhmm?” I prompt, tracing my fingers down her tummy.

“Maybe we could have more dream dates.” Ella muses hopefully. “Then we could both get some fun out of this.”

I blink in surprise. “Sweetheart, do you imagine that I’m not getting fun out of this? That I don’t enjoy giving you pleasure?”

“No, I know you do.” Ella answers, her skin flushing bright red. “In fact I think you might enjoy it too much.” She adds ruefully, earning a laugh in reply. I know she’s been overwhelmed by my dedication to making her see stars as often and frequently as I can, but I don’t feel the least bit sorry about it. She deserves all this and more.

“But I like giving pleasure too.” She finally admits, “and I feel guilty that you never get... you know, rewarded”

I should have realized that someone as generous as Ella would want to give affection as much, if not more, than she wants to receive it, but I wasn’t joking about my struggles with control. “Im sorry, baby.” I profess honestly, pressing a deep, lingering kiss to her lips. “I know it’s difficult. And believe me, I wish things were different. I wish I could be buried in your sweet p-

“Dominic!” Ella exclaims, cutting me off and looking scandalized.

“Tsk, poor little wolf,” I chuckle, “raised by those prudish humans.” Ella grumbles one of those adorable kittenish growls, and I mentally debate how often is too often to outrage her sweet sensibilities. I love her blushes, and I never want to lose the ability to shock her this way. For the time being I decide that dirty talk is only going to make abstaining more difficult. “The point was that I wish I could be buried in you 24/7, but we can’t”

“Not even in our dreams?” Ella inquires earnestly.

“Maybe if we dream in different beds.” I concede, “but I think it would be dangerous to try while sleeping together. If I can actually feel you in my arms, while I’m making love to you in my head... it would just be a recipe for disaster. I might even claim you while unconscious.”

Ella lowers her gaze in disappointment. “Okay, I suppose that makes sense.

“It’s only a few more months.” I say, hoping to offer her some comfort.

“And towards the end you probably won’t want me anywhere near you. You’ll be so uncomfortable and ready to get this baby out of you, that you’ll probably want to rip my head off just for putting it here in the first place.”

Ella frowns, and at first I think I’ve put my foot in my mouth. However a moment later

she inquires,

“Can I ask you something?”

“Anything.” I agree, much too quickly. She really does have me wrapped around her little finger.

“When we first met and the doctor was worried about the baby being too small, you mentioned that your mother had been told the same when she was carrying you.” Ella reminds me thoughtfully. I hum in confirmation, and she continues. “I’ve just, I’ve never had any women in my life to help guide me through this. I mean there’s plenty of nonsense online, but a billion women arguing with each other about what’s best and which experiences are accurate... it’s just not the same as hearing from someone you trust. Do you know much about your mother’s experience?” I find myself smiling, my mother’s beautiful face appearing in my head. “She used to tell me that story all the time. About how all the doctors were convinced I was going to be a runt, but I proved them wrong and ended up being one of the healthiest, strongest pups they’d even seen. Every time I doubted myself, or felt like a failure, she reminded me that nothing in life ever stays the same, and you never know how a story will turn out when you’re still in the thick of it.” “How old were you, when she died?” Ella questions gently, snuggling a bit closer to me, no doubt to lend her comfort. “I was only six.” I share softly. “I don’t remember much about her, but I remember that story, and I remember her smile. I learned a lot of the other pieces second-hand from my father, but those memories are the ones I know are my own.” Ella offers me a bittersweet smile. “Would you tell me... I mean, only if you want to, I’m just...”

“How she died?” I guess, knowing Ella is curious but reluctant to make me share a difficult story. I nod. “That seems only fair, since I’ve been asking you about all your traumas.”

“Still, you don’t have to tell me unless you want to.”

Ella repeats firmly.

“It’s okay, baby. You should know – it’s only right.”

I take a deep breath, transporting myself back to all those years ago, and begin.

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Sinclair

“Hmm, where oh where could my little pup be?”

My mother’s velvety voice sounds just on the other side of the cabinet where I’m

hiding. I press my hands over my mouth to try and silence my giggles, but a few small sounds still escape.

“Aha!” Mom whips open the cabinets two doors down, shouting with triumph only to

soften her tone into another thoughtful hum. “Not in there.”

She muses aloud, and I can almost see her rubbing her chin in thought.

As she moves closer I climb along the shelves, clambering over towels and wash rags

to settle in the cabinet she just searched and found empty. A shaft of light bursts into

the dark cupboards as my mother pulls open the doors where I’d just been sitting,

another delighted cry on her lips.

She doesn’t seem disappointed to have failed again, on the contrary she

sounds
impressed.

Ahh, he's a sneaky little sausage." She observes sagely, "That's very good. All the best hunters can track their targets as silently as a ghost." I can hear her footsteps circling, and I know she can smell me in the room, but I'm doing my best to outsmart her.

"In fact the very best predators can sometimes trick their prey into thinking they're the ones doing the hunting... when really they're about to be someone's dinner!" Her voice rises at the end as she lunges for another cupboard. It's getting harder and harder to hide my giggles as she fails to find me, but I know she's enjoying this just as much as I am. I shift again, crawling silently to the very last cupboard in the mansion's huge laundry room.

"What was that!" My mother's voice sharpens, and I can see her freezing through a small crack in the door. "Oh I wish my fierce little wolf was here to protect me! I think I'm being watched." She frets loudly. "I certainly hope something terrible isn't about to jump out and scare me."

Right on cue I leap out of the cupboard with a ferocious roar, pouncing on her and toppling her right to the ground. She cries out dramatically, throwing her arm over her

eyes to protect herself from the terrible sight of her attacker. "Oh no! A Vicious rogue,

please don't eat me!" She begs, "I have pups!"

"Mommy it's me!" I laugh hysterically, trying to pull her arm away from

her face.

Slowly she lowers her arm, blinking down at me in surprise. “Oh

Dominic, thank

goodness! You’ve gotten so big and strong I didn’t even recognize you. I

was sure I

was a goner!” Her shock and relief only lasts a moment, and then she

sits up, à

familiar spark in her green eyes. “Such a rascal – scaring me that way.”

She prowls

toward me, wagging her fingers in obvious threat. I back away, my

pudgy hands

outstretched in preparation to ward off the imminent attack. “And you

know what

happens to pups who play tricks on their Mommies don’t you? They get

a visit from

the tickle monster!” She lashes out and snatches me up, her hands

fluttering over my

tummy, tickling me mercilessly.

Within moments I’m on my back, squealing with mirth and trying to

push away her

hands. When I’m laughing so hard I can no longer breathe, I pounce

again, putting a

stop to the tickle monster’s relentless assault. I’m only six, but my

mother is so little

that I already stand as tall as her shoulder, and I must be at least half her

weight. I

flatten her to the laundry room floor, Sprawling on top of her and resting

my cheek on

her breast, breathing in her familiar Scent as I try to catch my breath.

Her arms come

around my back as I snuggle in, gentle fingers stroking my hair.

“There’s my sweet boy,” she murmurs, hugging me tightly.

“Mommy, I’m a fierce hunter.” I correct her indignantly, rolling my eyes

at her silliness.

There are some things Mommies just don’t understand. “

Deadly pred-terers are not sweet.”

“Says who?” She inquires, sounding slightly affronted..

“Um, says everyone.” I explain, as if it’s the most obvious thing in the world. “Alpha

warriors don’t come home from battle and run to their Mommies for cuddles. They go

drink and hunt and kiss she- wolves.”

“And what do you know about drinking and kissing she-wolves?” My mother counters,

playfully narrowing her eyes. “Have you been sneaking out to the pub at night?” She

gasps, gripping my arms. “How many wives do you have, tell me right now!”

“None!” I laugh, “I promise!” Of course, she doesn’t need to know that I already have a girlfriend.

Knowing how mothers worry, she’d probably overreact to learn how fast I’m growing up.

“Listen to me very carefully Dominic,” Mom replies after a moment, trailing her

fingertips up and down my back, “The best Alphas and the best warriors are the ones

who know that fighting is a last resort. They don’t do it because it’s tough or manly,

they do it because they have to protect their pack. They do it for love of their family

and people – nothing else.” She explains sternly. “You can’t ever forget that duty, or

that your power is a grave responsibility. Love is not a bad word, and sweetness is not

weakness – these things are your greatest strengths. You have to promise me that

you never stop coming to me for cuddles no matter how old you get, that you’ll never

hold yourself back from showing the people in your life how much you care about them. Never lose this side of you, Dominic.”

I nod, feeling the truth and conviction in her words, and secretly feeling relieved that I don’t have to act like I don’t care in order to be strong. I don’t want to stop hugging my Mom, I just thought that it wasn’t allowed in order to be a real man. “I promise.” I agree easily, thinking of my father then. He’s always touching and flirting with Mommy, and always tells Roger and me how much he loves us. He makes time to play with us and read bedtime stories, and always comforts us when we’re hurt or scared. He never shames us for those feelings, even if the rest of the world makes those things seem wrong. But then again, he’s the most powerful wolf in the pack, so if he can do it, it must not be wrong. Maybe it’s everyone else who has things backwards.

We’re still lying there when the fire alarm begins blaring. Mom sits up with me still in her arms, scenting the air. We both smell smoke at the same time, and she immediately jumps to her feet. She sets me on the ground and leads me up the stairs, her eyes scanning the manor around us with hawkish intensity. When we reach the front hallway, with the door only a few meters away, she releases me and nudges me towards the exit. “Get outside, baby. Go straight to the guardhouse, and wait for me there.”

“But what about you?” I ask anxiously, my heart pounding in my chest.

“I have to find Roger.” She explains, gazing towards the upper stories.
“Just go
sweetheart, I’ll be there before you know it.”
She kisses my cheek and dashes away up the stairs. I start to run outside,
when I
hear the sound of a cat yowling in the distance. Oh no! Pancake! I think
frantically,
picturing our new cat. He must be trapped!
I change directions, following the sounds of the frantic meows. They
carry me deeper
and deeper into the smokey house, until I can actually see the flames
climbing up the
outer walls. Fear slices through me, but I know Pancake is close and I
can’t leave him
to die. I finally find the terrified animal cowering under the china cabinet
in the dining
room, a blazing inferno surrounding him.
The door had been closed, and there hadn’t been another way out, but I
still find
myself scolding the young tabby. “Pancake what are you doing? Don’t
you know bout
fire alarms? They mean you have to get outs!” Shaking my head, I scoop
up the fluffy
creature, “What are you doing in a locked room anyway?”
When I turn back to the door, I finally remember my school lessons
about what to do
in the event of a fire. When I opened the door I’d let a bunch of air in,
feeding the
riotous flames. A wall of fire is blocking the door, and all I can do is
tuck Pancake
inside my shirt, and hope I’m fast enough. I sprint forward and leap
through the
flames, batting out sparks that linger in my hair on the other side. I’m
choking and
coughing, and belatedly remember to crawl on the ground where there’s

more

oxygen.

I'm still crawling along on one hand, using the other to hold Pancake still, when I hear

my mother's frantic screams. "Dominic!" She cries, Dominic where are you!"

"Mommy!" I call back, suddenly seeing her ahead of me. She has a wet rag pressed to

her mouth, and her eyes are wide with terror.

"Dominic! What are you doing, I told you to get out!"

She scolds, running towards me.

"I had to save Pancake! I cry, holding up the petrified feline.

Mom's expression softens, "Oh, of course! Poor pancake" She takes my hand and

begins leading me out. "Come on, now, we have to go."

My heart eases now that my Mom is here. I'm still scared, but I know I'm safe as long

as she's here. I don't know how the fire started, but it's amazing how quickly the

flames consumed the house.

Everywhere I look is black with smoke and suffocating heat. I've never felt anything

like it. I feel like my skin might blister just from being in the same room with the fire.

We're almost to the entryway when there's a horrible rumbling and cracking sound

above us, and before I understand what's happening, I'm being thrown forward

through the air. An explosion rocks the mansion as I crash into the ground, and when I

turn back I understand what's happened. The ceiling caved in behind me, but Mommy

is still trapped on the other side. She must have used all of her strength to toss me out

of harm's way, even knowing she would probably end up stuck. I can

barely see her
through the flames, only her glowing green eyes remain. I wonder if she
might shift,
but I know better – highly flammable fur is not any protection from a
fire. “Go!
Dominic!” She shouts through the whirring conflagration.
“No,” I yell, horrified. “I won’t leave you!”
“Go now!” Power rolls off of her in powerful waves, carrying an
authority I’m not yet
strong enough to defy. I don’t have a choice. My feet are moving
without my consent,
even as tears pour down my tear-stained cheeks. “No, Mommy No!”
“It’s okay, baby.” She cries, and I can hear tears in her voice. “This is
the way it should
be. It’s okay.”
She insists again. “I love you! Remember who you are!”
I’ve barely stepped clear of the inferno when the entire house collapses
in on itself,
sending a black mushroom cloud into the sky. Firefighters and guards
are surging
around me, pulling me to safety, but I hear nothing but my own screams
for my mother
– even though I know there’s no point.
She’s gone.

Accidental Surrogate For Alpha By Caroline Above Chapter 115

Ella
Tears are streaming down Sinclair’s face as he relives his Mother’s
death, and I’m
doing my best not to burst into outright sobs. My heart aches for the
little boy he once
was, and for the burden he obviously still carries today. Hearing this
story, I

understand that his last conversation with his mother had truly stayed with him over

the years, shaping him into the man before me now.

“Afterwards, I leaned that she’d gotten Roger out of the house only to realize that I wasn’t there.”

Sinclair Continues, wiping his eyes. “She ran back in to get me, even though the

guards tried to stop her.” Sinclair relates, “So you see, that’s why Roger always

blamed me... he wasn’t wrong. If I’d listened to her the first time, if I’d gone outside

when she told me to, she would still be alive now.”

“But Pancake wouldn’t.” I remind him thickly.

The corners of his mouth quirk up, “It was almost thirty years ago, baby.

Pancake is long gone.”

“You know what I mean” I chide him. “And your mother understood because you were

doing exactly what she was trying to teach you – to protect those more vulnerable

than yourself.”

“I know.” He confesses. “I spent years in therapy,

Just trying to come to terms with the fact that it was her choice. I was a child and

couldn’t have understood the danger, and she didn’t have to come after me.”

“But she was your mother, it wasn’t even a question for her.” I murmur, twining my

limbs with his so he can feel my solid weight in his arms. “She wanted you to live

much more than she cared about her own survival.”

He nods wordlessly, his eyes still distant, as if he hasn’t truly returned to the present.

“I understand that, but sometimes I still think that if it wasn’t for me, she

never would
have needed to make a choice in the first place. My decision that day
took her from
Dad and Roger and the pack.”

“Did you ever find out how the fire started?” I ask softly, running my
fingers through
the dark, thick locks of his hair.

“In the weeks after the fire, it became clear that it was arson.” Sinclair
explains
hoarsely. “Dad was away on pack business, and it was well known that
Mom was
home with the pups. We were never able to prove it, but we always
suspected the
attack was political. King Xavier was on the throne then, and my father
was his right
hand and next in line. All the politics that are playing out today – they
were already
under way back then.”

“You think it was the King – the current one, I mean?” I inquire.
Sinclair sighs, his emotions less potent now that we’ve moved on to
politics. “The
problem with being the biggest and baddest wolf around is that it puts a
colossal
target on your back. And the worse thing is that you’re so hard to kill
and people are
often so afraid of taking you on directly, that they go after your family
instead.” Sinclair
shares. “It might not be as effective as killing you, but Alphas who lose
their mate and
pups rarely recover fully.”

Sinclair pauses to nuzzle my neck and caress my belly, as if reminding
himself that
Rafe and I are safe. “It could have been anyone, but I actually think
Xavier is a more
likely suspect than the current king – my father was younger and not

quite strong
enough yet to rule, but it was clear he would be soon. Xavier didn't have
heirs and
though he still had a lot of time left to try and make them, I think the
writing was
already on the wall. My father was too strong and too well liked."
"Dominic, if it was arson then it wasn't your decision that took your
mother, it was
Xavier's, or whoever was responsible. It wasn't some tragic accident, it
was murder." I
argue, hating the guilt still dominating my mate's expression.
He gazes down at me tenderly. "You don't have to worry, Ella. I'm okay
– I forgave
myself a long time ago."
"But Dominic, there's nothing to forgive." I insist, near tears again. "It
wasn't your
fault." I pull back far enough to look into his emerald eyes. "I can tell
you right now,
that if it came down to me or Rafe, I would choose him every time –
even tiny as he is.
And I wouldn't ever want him to think that my sacrifice wasn't worth it,
or to blame
himself"
"Shhh," Sinclair tucks my head under his chin, stroking my spine. "It's
okay, little wolf. I
know."
"Stop comforting me! I'm supposed to be comforting you." I complain.
Trying and
failing to wriggle free.
"You are." Sinclair lies – the rat. "It comforts me just holding you this
way."
Settling, I decide to change tactics. "Do you have any idea how proud
your mother
would be, if she could see you today?" I ask him softly, hoping to help
ease his pain

but speaking with complete honesty. “You became exactly the man she hoped you would. You never lost sight of what matters most, even when the whole world was working against you. You lead with love instead of fear, and you don’t confuse strength with cruelty.”

“Now you’re just flattering me.” Sinclair rumbles with amusement.

“I’m not.” I bite back. “Do you remember when we first met, and you still thought I was a scheming gold digger?”

“Oh yes, I’m sure that would have made my mother very proud.” Sinclair jokes.

“When you realized you were wrong, you owned up to your mistake.” I continue

determinedly. “And when you saw I was hurting, your first instinct was to hug me. You

didn’t even think about it. I remember being so shocked, because here was this huge,

terrifying predator – and you held me more gently and with more compassion than

anyone in my entire life.”

A pleased purr vibrates beneath my hands. “You make me sound like my father, that’s

exactly how I used to think of him. He could go from being a grizzly to a teddy bear in

the blink of an eye.”

“Exactly.” I confirm. “I wish you could see yourself the way I do, Dominic. If you could,

you’d know I’m not just trying to pump up your ego – which, for the record, I wouldn’t

do because it’s already big enough.” I quip, yelping when Sinclair pinches my bottom.

“I’m telling you how proud your mother would be, because I believe it with every fiber

of my being.”

“Thank you, sweetheart.” Sinclair professes, kissing me. I eagerly return the gesture,

tilting my head to give him full reign of my mouth, and pressing my curves closer to his

hard body.

We’re just starting to get carried away when a knock sounds at the door, and Hugo’s

reluctant voice floats through the wood. “Alpha, it’s urgent.”

Sinclair reluctantly extracts himself from my arms, and strides to the door, as naked as

the day he was born. I hide my own nudity beneath the covers, burrowing deeper into

my nest as the Beta stalks into the room, not batting an eye at the scene awaiting him.

Instead he goes straight to the TV console against the far wall, clicking the remote

and bringing the screen to life. He flips the channels until the device lands on a

breaking news report.

An image of Lydia and the Prince appears in the top left frame of a news report,

above a headline reading: No longer in mourning? The Prince spotted in Old Town

with former Moon Valley Luna, Lydia Sinclair.

My jaw drops, and my brain scrambles to piece together the implications of this news.

I’m momentarily distracted by the way the reporters identified Lydia using Sinclair’s

name, feeling a rush of indignance for this slight. I pull the sheets from the bed,

wrapping them around my body and moving to Sinclair’s side. He tucks me under his

arm as Hugo increases the volume on the television.

“Mere weeks after the unspeakable tragedy of the Princess Angeline’s

murder, her
widower and political candidate Prince Damon was seen out and about
with Moon
Valley's former Luna. When asked for a comment, the pair reported that
they are just
friends, sharing that Lydia stepped forward to offer the Prince comfort in
his time of
need – being no stranger to tragedy herself.
Despite the platonic nature of their relationship, onlookers could help
but notice how
cozy the couple appeared, with many expressing hope that the prominent
she-wolf
can offer the grieving Prince solace at this difficult time. Are we
witnessing a new it
couple in the making? Is Lydia's friendship with the Prince going to
throw off Dominic
Sinclair's campaign? And where is the Moon Valley Alpha and his new
mate Ella? The
pair haven't been seen publicly in weeks, and speculation is brewing. All
this and
more, when we return.”
“Turn it off.” Sinclair rumbles, exhaling when the Screen goes dark
again. The three of
us exchange worried glances as the sound disappears, and I can tell
we're all thinking
the same thing. “What the actual fuck?”

Accidental Surrogate For Alpha By Caroline Above Chapter 116

Ella
Hugo, Sinclair and I are all staring at the television with wide eyes and
slack jaws,
unable to process the images flitting across the screen. It seems like
every time we

manage to take a few steps forward, Lydia and the Prince find a way to send us

reeling back – and this is no exception.

“This doesn’t make any sense.” Hugo expresses, obviously overwhelmed. “Why would

he risk losing the pack’s sympathy by parading around another Woman so soon after

his wife’s death?”

“Trust me, Hugo – Damon isn’t the one calling the shots here. This is all Lydia.”

Sinclair states gruffly. “She’s going to force her way onto the throne one way or

another. Right now she’s playing the doting friend, but mark my words, by the time the

election ends she’ll be in his bed.”

“How bad is this?” I ask, looking up at Sinclair’s handsome face, “Does she have

information that could hurt you?”

Sinclair Squeezes my shoulders, “She knows some secrets.” He relates, “but luckily

nothing I could imagine as a smoking gun. In fact most of what she knows would be

more harmful to the Prince things like my father’s attack, Things the public believes

were accidents but our private investigators proved malicious.” His mouth flattens into

a hard line. “The real danger is that she knows how we think, how we operate. Not to

mention that the Prince doesn’t have more than two brain cells to rub together, but

Lydia has plenty.”

“So what do we do?” I ask anxiously, my head replaying the news reel over and over

again. “My bed rest isn’t common knowledge, and they’re making it sound like my

absence from the public eye is suspicious. Do we tell everyone about my condition?

Or do we make an appearance?”

“I’m afraid making an appearance might play right into their hands. This could be

some sort of attempt to lure us out of hiding.” Hugo advises, looking very grim indeed.

In the distance I hear the front door open and close – a fact which comes as quite a

surprise, since my hearing has never been so sharp before.

Wheels roll over the door jam, and then Henry’s voice floats up toward us, “Good

Morning!”

“Henry!” I exclaim, both taken aback yet unsurprised we stayed in bed so long.

Sinclair’s father has been coming over almost every day since we agreed to be

invalids together, and he’s been an invaluable help, since I learned my true identity.

I grab some loungewear and disappear into the restroom to change. I might be a wolf,

but my human modesty is too deeply ingrained to allow me to strut around nude the

way Sinclair does – and I’m definitely not changing in front of Hugo.

When I emerge, Sinclair is also dressed, though much more formally than I am.

We go downstairs together, Sinclair carrying me despite my protests.

My blood

pressure is improving more and more every day, but it isn’t enough to free me of bed

rest yet. We all gather around the breakfast table, the men analyzing these recent

developments in low, serious voices, and me feeling like an outsider eavesdropping

on matters I can’t begin to understand. It’s not that they exclude me, I

just feel so out
of my depth.

“What do you think, Ella?” Sinclair asks, turning his blazing emerald eyes to me.

They’ve been going around in circles for more than half an hour, debating how we should respond to this crisis.

I gnaw on my lower lip thoughtfully, trying to ignore the flash of emotion in Sinclair’s eye as he observes the nervous habit. Releasing my swollen lip, I sigh,

“Do we ever know what happened with Lydia’s husband? I mean the Princess is dead, but Lydia’s still married to some other Alpha, right?” I clarify. When the men nod, I continue.

“Where is he in all this? Even if he doesn’t want her anymore, it must make him look bad for her to be gallivanting around another territory with another Alpha.”

“That’s a good point.” Henry praises, maintaining a straight-faced expression which reassures me that he’s not giving out false compliments. “Maybe we’ve been going about this the wrong way.

Instead of trying to understand their motivations, we can simply leave it at knowing they’re corrupt and respond without playing into their hands.

After all, they’ll be expecting some sort of countermove to challenge the media’s narrative, but we might be able to spin ourselves out of the hot seat and refocus the attention onto them – where it belongs.”

“Keep them busy and distract the pack by rustling up her husband and causing drama” Hugo nods approvingly. “Good idea, Ella.”

Sinclair squeezes my hand in support, but when I look over, his features are still

drawn with worry. "I still don't like it. I think it's the best hope we have, but something

about this entire situation just doesn't seem right."

"Well of course not." Hugo scoffs, "You don't need to convene a blue-ribbon

committee to tell you this is all fucked six ways to Sunday."

"No, I mean, I feel like I'm missing something."

Sinclair replies drying. "There's something bothering me and I just can't put my finger

on it."

"Well, you've been saying from the beginning that Princess Angeline's death felt off –

like a political scheme." I contribute softly.

"Right, but one the Prince is too unimaginative to have orchestrated."

Hugo confirms.

Sinclair's eyes widen almost imperceptibly, and then he clenches them shut, closing

his hand into a fist and swearing up a storm. "What?"

"You know who isn't too unimaginative?" Sinclair growls, scanning our concerned

faces.

"Lydia." Henry supplies easily. "And while Prince Damon might have seen his mate as

little more than a trophy, he's not the type to impulsively destroy one of his prized

possessions. But Lydia wouldn't have any reservations about getting the Princess out

of the way."

"Are you saying what I think you are?" I gape, both certain I've understood and yet

unable to believe my ears..

"As crazy as it seems, what other explanation do we have?" Sinclair inquires, rising to

his feet and pacing back and forth behind the dining table. “If the Prince had lost his temper and beat her to death, I wouldn’t question it. And if there was some sort of violent attack, you could make the case for rogues or vengeance for some slight committed by Damon. But poison? That’s a woman’s weapon.” “True, and if it was a political scheme you would think the royal family would have staged her death and spun the details in a way that benefitted the campaign beyond Damon looking sympathetic.”

Henry agrees. “Instead it just seems... odd.”

“Exactly.” Sinclair confirms. “If it was planned, then why haven’t they jumped on the golden opportunity to lay blame and cast aspersions? Why haven’t the Prince and his son been parading their grief around Moon Valley for all to see?” He gesticulates, getting more and more enthused now.

“I don’t think anyone in the palace knew this was coming. I think Lydia got rid of her competition and slid into the role of ‘concerned friend’ in order to ingratiate herself to the Prince.”

“You really think Lydia would go to that length?”

Hugo asks skeptically.

“Don’t forget the way she played my sons for so many years.” Henry cuts in, his low voice as harsh as I’ve ever heard it. “Lydia is a cunning she-wolf who proved herself willing to do anything for power. And if she can ruin her fated mate’s life without a shred of remorse, I guarantee she won’t have qualms about ruining others.”

Sinclair looks ready to argue with the idea that his life is ruined, but this isn't the time.

"Okay, so let's say all this is true," I suggest, trying and failing to wrap my brain around the idea that anyone could be so calculating and cruel. "What does it mean for the campaign?"

"It means that we have some decent ammunition to use against the Prince and Lydia."

Hugo assesses simply.

"But surely we have to be careful about using it?" I question. "I mean they need to look like they're in this together, otherwise the story becomes heartless bitch takes

advantage of grieving widower.' If we play this wrong the Prince could end up looking

even more sympathetic than before"

"That's a good point." Sinclair acknowledges, the corner of his mouth twitching at my made-up headline. "And you'd better believe that Lydia is going to have plenty of dirty tricks up her sleeve.

We might have figured a few things out, but if we're right it means things are even

more complicated than before."

"So what's our move?" Henry presses, watching his son with the expression of a

proud father wolf who knows his pup already has the answer.

First things first, we track down Lydia's husband and encourage him to remind the

realm that she isn't the concerned citizen she seems." Sinclair decides firmly.

"Second, we quietly get proof that she was behind the Princess's death, even if we

don't plan to use it, we need to know for sure.

Finally, we make sure the pack remembers exactly what kind of mate the Prince was to his wife. He might not be guilty of her murder, but he's certainly guilty of other crimes against her and the people need to see what he calls protection and caring.”

“And us?” I ask anxiously, looking up at my mate. Sinclair offers me a grim smile, “We sit tight, focus on keeping our pup and your wolf safe inside you, and hope we don't have to do anything desperate ourselves.”

Accidental Surrogate For Alpha By Caroline Above Chapter 117

Ella

When Sinclair and Hugo finally leave for the pack headquarters, Henry and I move into our favorite sitting room, returning to the puzzle we began solving together earlier this week. Seated across from the older wolf, I pretend to scan the scattered puzzle pieces for matches, while really sneaking peeks up at him. “So what do you make of all this?”

I ask curiously. “Lydia and the Prince?”

Henry grimaces, “I never liked that woman. But trying to argue with headstrong young Alphas' convinced they've found their mate is like beating your head against a wall.”

He offers me a tender smile. “You'll see soon enough. You can do everything in your power to try and teach your pups the important lessons and prepare them for the real world – but at the end of the day you have to let them make their own

mistakes – it's

the only way they learn.”

“Does it ever hurt any less? Or get any easier to watch them go down the wrong

path?” I inquire softly.

“Not a damn bit.” Henry shares grimly. However despite his grim look, his eyes

sparkle when he looks over at me. “Luckily, that doesn't seem to be despite his grim

look, his eyes sparkle when he looks over at me. “Luckily, that doesn't seem to be a

problem for me anymore. Lydia is out of the picture, my boys are friends again for the

first time since losing their mother, and Dominic is on his way to being King.”

“Dominic just told me how his mother died this morning.” I confess, reaching for the

old wolf's gnarled hand. “Im so sorry you went through that.

It must have been terrible for you to be left alone with a pack to rule and two young

boys to raise on your own, in the midst of all your grief.”

He nods, “looking back I don't have the first idea how I survived it. The grief almost

destroyed me... and I'm ashamed to say I let it destroy Dominic and Roger's

relationship.” Henry sighs. “I haven't always been the best father, but I can tell you

right now that it was a hell of a lot easier to be one when I had my mate.”

I know what he means. When I thought I was going to be bringing this baby into the

world alone, I'd been terrified. Very few people who plan for children expect to end up

alone with the responsibility, and though I'd been one of the rare few – it certainly

hadn't been by choice. I was thrilled to finally succeed, but the stakes seemed a thousand times higher without a partner. I'm still afraid of course, but it feels so much better to be part of a team. I know that as long as Sinclair is alive, I will always have someone to lean on and my pup will have two loving parents to guide him through the world.

"I never would have believed I could do it without her, and I'm proud that I managed..." Henry continues, his mouth a quivering line. "but I will never stop being haunted by the knowledge that the wrong parent died... they would have been so much better off if Juliet had been here instead of me."

"Please don't say that." I beg, feeling tears in my eyes for the second time in as many hours.

"Why not? It's true." Henry shrugs, his dark eyes shining. "There's no use denying it or letting ego get in the way. You'll see that too – nothing humbles you like being a parent."

My mind scrambles for an argument, not because I want to invalidate his feelings, but

because I know in my heart that losing any parent is never the answer.

"Has Dominic ever told you about his last conversation with Juliet?" I finally ask, "before the fire started, before everything went wrong?"

Henry thinks for a moment, "No, not that I can recall."

Slowly, careful to get the details right, I repeat the story Sinclair shared with me this morning.

Dominic's mother gave him permission to ignore what society dictated," I summarize at the end."

But he already had the example you provided to guide him. He was only six, and he might always have remembered those words because they were her last, but he lived

them because of you. He is the Alpha he is today because of you.

Because you showed him every day how to walk the walk."

"You know that all happened right here?" Henry inquires thoughtfully, his expression

far off as he looks around the room. "I moved the boys to a new home after the fire.

But when Dominic grew up and made his fortune, he rebuilt the original manor in her honor."

"I didn't know," I admit, looking around the huge mansion. "Was it always this grand?"

Henry chuckles. "It was even grander in my day – Dominic isn't the only one who did well for himself, you know."

"I know." I laugh, snatching up a distinctive puzzle piece belonging to my current focus

area. But I think I got us distracted. I was asking you about Lydia."

"Darling, when you have all day, diversions are a blessing, not a curse."

Henry

advises warmly, patting the arms of his wheelchair. "The first year I was in this chair, I

would have begged for a lovely young she-wolf to distract me from the monotony."

"And now I feel like you might be distracting me intentionally." I remark slyly. Henry

chuckles again, but it's the defeated laugh of a man who knows the game is up. "Oh

Ella, you are too clever for your own good, you know that?”
Just tell me, Henry.” I request gently. “Whatever is worrying you can’t
be as painful as
reliving your mate’s death.”
His brows arch and he flashes his fangs in agreement. “It’s just that I’ve
seen this film
before”
He finally admits. “I’ve seen what happens when there’s this kind of
competition for
the throne, and it never ends well for anyone.”
“Isn’t it always like this?” I inquire, not caring that I might be showing
my ignorance of
shifter politics.
“No, it isn’t.” Henry explains. “Normally the Alphas of each pack in the
union are pretty
evenly matched. They battle it out on the campaign trail, the people vote
and the
Alpha’s who don’t get enough points return to their council duties. The
problem is
when you have a few extremely strong Alphas competing at the top,
forcing all the
pack Alpha’s to choose sides and form alliances rather than competing
themselves. It
focuses all the pressure and all the danger on the one or two men who
actually stand
to win.”
“So when there are lots of wolves in the running, they’re so busy
keeping an eye on all
their opponents that they can’t afford to zero in on anyone in particular.
But when
there are only a few, it results in all the stuff we’ve been facing?” I
question, searching
for clarity. “The assassination attempts and death threats?”
“Yes.” Henry confirms. “And the divisions are worse because Dominic
and the Prince

are two very different animals. The Prince has the edge for being the King's heir. He has wealth and a clear willingness to throw thousands of ordinary wolves under the bus to benefit his friends. He's famously corrupt, and everyone knows he can be bought for the right price. For a certain type of person, that's a very tempting type of King to place in power."

"But Dominic is the exact opposite." I realize slowly. "So those same people who would benefit if the Prince wins, suddenly stand to lose in a big way if an honest, incorruptible wolf takes control."

Henry nods. "You're starting to see now. Dominic views all this as the fight between good vs evil, and in some ways he's right."

"But in others?" I press, feeling my heart beat faster with every word we speak.

"The world isn't split up into angels and devils, Ella" Henry sighs, "it's full of complicated and flawed individuals with a thousand different motives guiding them forward."

"I thought.. it sounded like the united packs and the Alpha council want stability over everything else though." I object, rubbing my, suddenly aching, neck.

"Yes, but what is stability?" Henry challenges.

Dominic believes it's peace, but there are a lot of people out there who see it as preserving the status quo; ensuring that those currently in power remain in power to avoid constant turnover in leadership."

"Why are you telling me all this?" I ask, my mouth suddenly feeling very dry.

“Because I know my son, I know the way he talks.” Henry answers seriously. “Dominic grew up in this world and he’s suffered the harsh realities it creates. He understands all this even if he doesn’t make it explicit. But you’re not from this world, and I want to make sure you know what you’re truly up against.”

“You’re saying that I shouldn’t assume we’re going to win.” I assess shakily. “I need to be realistic about the possibility that we’ll lose.”

“Yes, Ella.” Henry confirms sorrowfully. “I hate to say it, but the more we learn about your past, about Lydia’s schemes and all the chaos that has happened in between.. this is feeling less and less like a journey to the top, and more like a bomb waiting to explode.”

My hand gravitates protectively towards my belly.

“I think I’m going to be sick.”

Henry reaches for me, looking worried now. “I’m sorry, dear one. Should I have kept my mouth shut?”

“No.” I breathe, trying to calm my gag reflex. “I needed to know. And now that I do -I can start to prepare.”

Accidental Surrogate For Alpha By Caroline Above Chapter 118

Ella

I’ve been replaying my conversation with Henry all day long, repeating the exchange over and over in my mind and trying to decipher if the old Alpha was trying to want me as a mere precaution, or because he really believes we have something to

be worried about. After Henry left this evening I got online and started looking into the actual mechanics of the election – something I should have done from the very beginning.

It all looks fairly simple on paper. All eligible Alphas compete in the public arena and all the shifters in the realm vote on election day. This usually results in two or three frontrunners, and the Alpha council makes its selection based on the remaining competitors. If there's a wide margin and a clear winner, they usually just reinforce the popular Vote, but when there are ties or controversies, they provide an important check on the system.

Once elected, the Alpha King will remain in power until they die, coronate one of their heirs, or are removed from power by council decree.

Historically elections are actually very rare, because most King's belong to an existing dynasty and pass down the title through the generations of their children. As I'm

reading, I discover that the current King is the only the third ruler in history to ever be removed from power, and his own election five years ago was the first in 200 years.

The fact that the wolves are already having another Vote is absolutely unprecedented.

The knot in my stomach tightens as all this information comes together. I realize that

Henry was right to warn me, after all.

“What are you frowning at so intently, trouble?”

Sinclair inquires, striding out of the bathroom and ruffling his wet hair with a towel.

Another Swath of terry cloth is slung around his hips, and water drips down his bare torso. My mouth waters as I take in the sight of his rippling muscles and powerful physique, but the heavy weight in my stomach is preventing my inner wolf from getting too distracted.

“Dominic, what will happen if we lose the campaign?” I inquire hesitantly, still sitting in bed with the computer in my lap.

Sinclair’s face pulls into a grimace, and he crosses the distance between us, peeking at my screen.

Seeing a dozen tabs worth of dry political research open in my browser, he slides his hand around my nape, massaging my tense muscles. “Doing some research?”

“Yes.” I confirm gravely. “And I have to admit, I’m worried.” He sits on the edge of the bed, still cradling my head in his oversized hand. “What’s bothering you most?”

“I just feel like everything is getting more confusing and out of hand every day.” I share.

Your father explained a little of the history to me, and when I stop and think about all the secrets, conspiracies and crises that keep popping up.. it’s hard not to feel like something seriously sketchy is going on. I’m beginning to feel like a pawn in some game I didn’t even know I was playing.”

Sinclair pauses, his hands stilling on my body.

Am I making you feel that way?”

“No, not you.” I assure him, closing the laptop and sliding closer to Sinclair. “But I also

don't know who is pulling the strings here. I feel like we're being swept up in

something much bigger than us, and it scares me.”

Sinclair nods in understanding, “I'm scared too.”

He admits, shocking me.

“You are?” I squeak, scooting even closer and practically climbing on top of him.

Sinclair purrs and pulls me all the way into his lap.

“Of course I am. I have a lot to lose.” He proclaims soberly, squeezing me tightly so

that I know he's talking about Rafe and me. “But that's not a bad thing.

It's a constant

reminder about what's really important. It helps me keep our family safe and pushes

me to take precautions I might not otherwise. It's the reason I can't accept defeat in

It's strangely comforting to hear this huge Alpha confessing his own fears. On one

hand it should terrify me to know that he doesn't feel as indomitable as he always

seems, but I like knowing that I'm not alone in this – that I'm not just being silly or

cowardly.

I understand that you have to approach the campaign as if losing is not an option.” I

tell him, moving to straddle his thighs and take his face in my hands. I stare up into his

fierce green eyes, brushing my thumbs over the layer of scruff covering his stony jaw.

“But it is a possibility, and I need to prepare for that. I need to know what to expect, I

need to know the plan.”

Sinclair exhales heavily, his hands clenching and unclenching on my waist. His

rugged mouth is set in a hard line, and I quickly see that he doesn't want

to add to my fears by putting new possibilities in my head. “You must have one. You’re too smart not to prepare for the worst case, even if you don’t plan on letting it come to pass.”

He drops his head to the crook of my neck, breathing in my scent and rumbling deep in his chest. “If I lose the campaign..” He begins slowly, his voice like gravel in my ear.

“It will all depend on how fast the Prince moves, and where we are when it happens.”

Sinclair doesn’t say any more, and I nudge his head up, forcing him to look me in the eye again.

But you must have some idea -“

“Ella, I have dozens of contingency plans in place.”

Sinclair interrupts, sounding as though he’s run out of patience. “I have plans for getting you out of the territory while I stay behind, I have plans for us being exiled

together, for my imprisonment, my death, your capture. If you can think of it, I have a

plan for it, sweetheart. But we don’t know how this is going to play out yet, and I can’t

tell you which plan we’re going to need if the worst happens.”

My lower lip quivers dangerously, and I can’t help the fresh bloom of hurt that

blossoms in my chest.

“Why didn’t you tell me you were this worried? I thought we agreed that I can’t avoid

danger if I don’t know it exists.”

Sinclair takes a deep breath, appearing to calm himself. “All Alphas have plans like

this, Ella.” He explains. “Whether Or not there is a campaign, Alphas always have

targets on their backs. I had these plans for Linda when we were married, and I have my men drafting new plans as the situation develops.”

“Oh.” I murmur, my pain easing a little. “So you just didn’t consult me.”

“Baby, I don’t even know all the plans.” Sinclair counters. “These are emergency scenarios which our guards spend countless hours developing and memorizing. I notify them every time a new threat or vulnerability develops, and they build it into their equations.”

This makes sense, but my bullshit barometer is still flashing red in my mind. “But you must know the most likely ones – you must have directed your men about how to care for the baby and me if you can’t be there to protect us yourself?”

“Yes.” Sinclair concedes, lifting me off of him and rising to his feet. He’s pacing now, giving off the feral energy of a caged animal. “And I didn’t tell you because I’m already going out of my fucking mind with worry about all this! I can’t stand thinking about these possibilities myself, so I certainly didn’t want to frighten you with them too.”

” He glances at me regretfully, raw emotion blazing in his brilliant irises. “I couldn’t stand the idea of looking you in the eye and telling you I might not be able to protect you and this baby the way I’ve promised I always will.”

My heart softens, and not for the first time, I realize just how much stress Sinclair is under.

Moreover, I realize just how much he downplays his own anxieties and fears in order to prioritize mine. “Listen to me, Dominic. I know you have your Alpha

pride and you
get to make the rules and all that other nonsense.” I summarize
impudently, climbing
out of bed and approaching the big wolf. “But I also know Lunas are
supposed to
share their mate’s burdens and soothe them when they’re being
impossible and
stubborn. We know I’m not just some weak human now. I can handle
more than
you’re giving me credit for.”
The corner of Sinclair’s mouth twitches, and I whip my pointer finger
toward him in
warning.
It’s time you let me help you.” I declare imperiously, notching my chin
up. “So tell me
what I can do to make you feel better, and I’ll do it.”
As I glare up at Sinclair, I suddenly realize that I might have bitten off
more than I can
chew. His eyes are glowing now, and his fangs extended. His scent has
deepened
and grown even richer, and all of a sudden I find my body hitched up
against his.
The finger I’d been pointing at him is now trapped in his powerful fist,
and the breath is
wrenched from my lungs as his growl washes over me.
“You know the problem with all this, little wolf?”
He asks, sending shivers of delight down my spine. “When I told you
she-wolves
soothed their mates, I didn’t mean they did it with kind words and
cuddles. What I
need is to feel in control even though the world around me is falling
apart. What I need
is to calm the wolf clawing his way out beneath my skin, rabid with the
need to claim
his mate”

I gulp, feeling my own wolf roll right over and expose her soft underbelly to him. “Well, what are you waiting for?”

Accidental Surrogate For Alpha By Caroline Above Chapter 119

Ella

The next thing I know, Sinclair is prowling forward across the room, backing me towards the bed. He seems barely human, barely in control of his wolf – but I understand now why he hasn’t sought more comfort from me. I’d gotten so used to his sultry innuendos and dark promises that I forgot how serious these matters truly are to wolves. But now I see the truth. I pushed him, forced him to admit things he was trying to shield me from, then challenged his authority, demanded that he let me do my job. My inner wolf is a veritable basket case. She’s both excited and intimidated, thrilled and daunted, eager to please and utterly defiant about the idea of submitting to anyone – even Sinclair. For weeks now she’s been begging for Sinclair’s mark, and now that the ridiculous creature is about to get it – she wants to play hard to get. The backs of my knees collide with the bed, and Sinclair lifts me as though I weigh nothing, tossing me back into the plush comfort of my nest. I scramble onto my hands and knees, baring my teeth at the bossy wolf and emitting a soft growl. I don’t appreciate him messing up the safe cocoon I created for our pup,

and though something deep down inside of me is quivering with appreciation for his dominance, I don't care for his high-handed behavior. Sinclair unslings the towel still wrapped around his waist, an ominous chuckle on his lips. "Such a fierce little mate." He observes, his eyes hooded with desire. "Have you already forgotten how desperate you've been to bare my mark?" I narrow my eyes as he crawls onto the bed, climbing over the overabundance of pillows and blankets. He lashes out and catches my ankle, deftly sliding my legs out from under me and pulling me towards him over the mattress. I yelp in surprise, but the next thing I know "updated by jobnib.com" I'm on my back with Sinclair looming over me, blissfully naked. My eyes scan his chiseled form: from his glorious bronze skin, which glistens in the low light; to his devilishly handsome face; and all the way down to the huge, hard member between his legs. Suddenly I find myself stretching out so he can appreciate my curves, shifting and writhing against the silken sheets. It's as if the mere sight of this man was able to steal my sanity, to make me forget my resolve to make him work for his prize. "There she is." Sinclair croons, extending a single claw and dragging it down the front of my top, only deep enough to tear the thin fabric without touching my delicate flesh. "All fire and feistiness until you get a peek of something you like." I gasp, feeling another flash of indignance even as heat pools low in my belly. His claws eviscerate

my sweatpants as well, and now I'm naked before him.
His ravenous gaze travels every inch of my exposed skin, and his pupils dilate with unbridled lust. "I have to say I know the feeling." He croons. It should be a crime to be so gorgeous."
His compliments make me preen and show off even more. I don't understand why I'm behaving this way, but my wolf is calling the shots now. I rise up onto my knees, sliding my hands up his bare chest and nibbling his pecs. I planned on kissing him once I reached his mouth, fantasized about dragging him down to the bed and making him forget his own name.
Then one of Sinclair's powerful fists forms a handhold in my hair, and he tilts my head back, holding me captive. His free hand trails down to the curve of my belly, settling over our pup. "Im not going to claim you, Ella." He rumbles, sternly and a needy whine escapes my lips. Sinclair's lips graze mine as he speaks, his eyes boring into my
own, absorbing every ounce of my frustration and desire. "But I am going to take you up on your offer." He informs me huskily. "Im going to take control, Ella. And if you test me, I will treat you exactly how I would treat any other naughty she-wolf." He proclaims, softening his tone but not his hold. "I need you to promise you'll tell me if I cross a line."
"And if I said you already have?" I challenge, not meaning a word of it, but wanting to see how far I can push him.
"Then Id remind you that I can smell your arousal." Sinclair purrs,

sliding the hand on
my tummy between my legs. His thick fingers immediately sink into the
wetness
soaking my cleft, and I can barely restrain my moan of delight.”
And your mischief,” Sinclair adds, knocking his nose against mine, “and
your fear.”
I snap my teeth at him, feeling wilder and more fearless than I can ever
remember
being. Sinclair only chuckles, removing his fingers from my aching s3x
– despite my
outrage. “So that’s the way it’s going to be, hmm?”
It wouldn’t be true control if you didn’t have to take it. My wolf answers
in my head,
apparently not quite ballsy enough to speak to Sinclair directly.
Seriously? I demand. You brazen little – Hey, don’t slut shame me. She
answers
indignantly. There’s nothing wrong with knowing what you want and
going after it.
Excuse me, but do you actually know what you want? I silently scoff.
One moment
you’re provoking him and the next you’re writhing around under him
like a cat in heat.
Hey, don’t call me a cat – that’s offensive. She snipes. Besides, It’s all
part of the
game, silly. I can practically hear her rolling her eyes. You’ll see. He
needs this, and so
do I.
That’s easy for you to say. I complain. You’re writing checks but my ass
is the one who
has to cash them.
Don’t act like you were some shrinking violet before you found out
about me, she
accuses. You were getting yourself in trouble long before you knew your
true nature.
Forcing myself back into the present, I realize that Dominic has been

watching the emotions flitting across my face, waiting for me to respond. Amusement is clear in his wolfish smirk, but he doesn't show me any mercy. "What's the matter, baby? Your wolf giving you trouble?" His strong hands are moving over my naked form, caressing me almost reverently, even as he taunts me. This time my wolf does respond for me, "No, I've simply changed my mind." I reply with a sniff. "I don't want your mark anymore. I think I'll go out and try to find a different mate instead. One who's not afraid to claim what's his." Horror floods me as I realize what I've just said, and suddenly Sinclair's hands are anything but reverent. He rotates his neck as if he's having to physically force his instincts down, and when he returns his gaze to me, he looks absolutely lethal. "Well in that case, I'll just have to make sure you can't get away." Sinclair pounces, and the next thing I know, I'm flat on my back on the bed. His mouth crashes into mine, and from then on the only sounds I make are whimpers and moans. I know this is just the beginning. I know I pushed Sinclair so far that he's going to find some diabolically sexy way of punishing me, and Goddess help me, but I can't wait. I slide my arms and legs around him, holding his body to mine as he steals kiss after kiss. When my lips are swollen and red, he moves on, kissing, licking and nipping his way over my jaw and down my neck. I rock my hips into his, thinking how incredibly easy it would be to slide myself onto his hardness right now. After all, there's nothing between our bodies

anymore, and my slickness is already coating his thick shaft from all our grinding. I try to lift my hips high enough to hook his tip inside my channel, but Sinclair realizes what I'm doing and clamps his hands around my hips, forcing them back down. Sinclair shakes his head, sounding amused but also as though he's barely clinging to his own self-control. "Such a bad girl." He admonishes, leaving the soft spot behind my ear. Sinclair's fangs graze my sensitive earlobe, followed shortly by the deep vibrations of his voice. "Tell me, sweet Ella. Has anyone ever tied you up?"

With those simple words, the entire world is wrenched right out from under me. I'm no longer safe in my nest with Sinclair. I'm twenty years and a hundred miles away, forced back into a past I never wanted to revisit. I must have gone completely stiff in his arms, because Sinclair's steady weight lifts away from me, and his worried face appears above me. "Sweetheart, what is it?" I push him away, sitting up and heaving in panicked breaths as the blood rushes in my ears. The room around me has disappeared, replaced by the wretched halls of the orphanage. I'm shaking from head to toe, and no matter what I do, I can't seem to get enough air to breathe. "Fuck," Sinclair curses under his breath, and I feel his strong arms wrapping around me. "Ella, it's okay. You're safe."

I clamp my eyes shut, trying to banish the sights and smells assaulting my mind, the memories I've tried so hard to forget. Sinclair hesitantly shifts me into

his lap, rocking
me back and forth. He repeats the same words over and over again.
“You’re safe.
I’m here”
It takes some time but eventually I believe him. I come hurtling back
down to earth at
the speed of a meteor, crashing into a crater of despair. Still Sinclair
doesn’t stop
telling me that I’m safe and that he loves me. I cling to him like a
liferaft, praying that
this solace will never cease, but knowing it must. There’s no avoiding it
now. When I’m
calm enough I’m going to have to explain – and that’s the very last thing
I want to do.

Accidental Surrogate For Alpha By Caroline Above Chapter 120

Ella
When my panic attack finally eases and I can breathe again, I peek up at
Sinclair,
tears burning in my eyes. “I’m sorry.” I murmur weakly, hating that my
stupid brain
ruined our moment.
“Why the hell are you apologizing?” Sinclair counters, still petting me.
He hadn’t let
me go even once as I weathered the storm of anxiety and despair, only
pulling the
pillows and blankets of my nest closer so I would feel secure.
“Because I screwed everything up.” I explain thickly. “I was supposed to
be helping
you and I fell apart at a mere suggestion.” Shame is coursing through my
veins, not
because of the panic itself, but because of what it might mean: that I’m
too fragile, too

broken, to be Sinclair's Luna.

"Ella, don't be silly." He replies, and though I understand he didn't mean to dismiss my feelings, the words still sting. Sinclair opens his mouth to continue, undoubtedly with some trite placcation about how 'these things happen' or similar, but I cut him off.

"I'm not being silly!" I insist with exasperation.

What good am I as a mate if I can't even be there for you when you need me? I get to

lie around all day doing nothing while you're out saving the world. You are constantly

taking care of me on top of all your other Worries, and I never give you anything in

return. It's not right. You shouldn't have to comfort me when you're the one who needs

to decompress!" I burst, throwing up my hands. "All this time we've been convinced

that I can't be your Luna because I'm human, but we never even considered that I

might not be up to the task, even as a wolf." My voice is shaking with fresh tears, and I

can't look at Sinclair as I continue, "But now... what more evidence do we need?"

Sinclair doesn't make a sound, and when I look at him, he's positively fuming. His

heavy breathing and black expression tell me he's barely holding onto his temper, and

the hands which were caressing me mere moments ago are now stationary and stiff. I

watch as he struggles to quell his anger, even though I'm not sure what I said to

infuriate him this way. After a second he shakes his head, apparently surrendering the

battle. "I need a minute, Ella." He finally growls, "I need to go for a run,

but I don't want
to leave you unless you're alright."
"Stop it!" I burst, my voice cracking. I'm out of the bed in a heartbeat,
pacing back and
forth in front of the bed. "This is exactly what I'm talking about!
Stop protecting me from reality. If you're angry with me, then be angry!
Let me deal
with the Consequences of my weakness!"
Sinclair leaps out of the nest, stalking forward with white-knuckled fists.
"I'm not going
to yell at you when you've just had a panic attack, Ella. If you want to
be upset with
me, fine, but I need to let my wolf out and run off this temper." He turns
and charges
for the door, bypassing me completely.
Then, at the last moment, he turns back, his wolf glowing in his eyes.
"And for the
record, this isn't special treatment." He rumbles angrily, "I don't believe
in arguing or
taking action when I'm out of control this way. If you need anything
while I'm gone, just
ask the guards."
With that, Sinclair disappears, and I can hear his wolf racing away down
the hall. For
a while I simply stand there, staring after him. I'm shaking again, and I'm
trying my
best not to dissolve into a fresh bout of weeping. I consider calling Cora,
but I
remember the way she accused me of selfishly unloading my problems
onto her, and I
refrain.
My wolf is pacing anxiously in my head, whimpering like a pup and
feeling just as raw
as I am – if more feral. She's begging me to do something, to fix this,
but I don't know

how. I might have felt terrible for falling apart when I was supposed to be soothing

Sinclair, but my wolf seems much more distraught about Sinclair's anger.

We should go after him! She begs. I can't stand it, we have to fix this.

We can't. I grumble in reply. Even if I wasn't on bed rest and it was perfectly safe, we'll

never be able to catch up with him. Besides, he'll only be angrier if we leave the

house.

She whimpers in understanding, though she's still beside herself. I climb back into

bed, curling into a little ball and pulling the blankets over my head. I

haven't felt this

way before, though Sinclair has certainly been angry with me in the past.

Hey, I ask

my wolf after some thought. Why weren't you this upset when he accused me of being

a gold digger, or when he spanked me or dragged me out of Cora's?

All those times were different. She argues. I was barely awake in the beginning, and

when he's been angry in the past it's been protective. This is the first time he's really

been hostile .. and the first time he's walked out. What if he doesn't come back?

Of course he'll come back. I assure her, but there's a small part of me that fears the

exact same thing.

Logically I know he has to come back, even if he only returns to end our relationship –

after all, he lives here. But somewhere deep down inside of me there's a frightened

orphan who imagines I'll never see him again.

But what if he decides we're not worth the trouble, and simply takes off for greener

pastures? My wolf presses.

You're being ridiculous! I shout at her. His entire life is here. His pack is here. He has

too much integrity to abandon his duty that way.

But what if? She digs in her paws. It wouldn't be the first time. He told us no wolf

would ever willingly abandon their pup, especially with humans – but our parents did.

Something must be seriously wrong with us – what if he's finally figured it out too?

What if this was the last straw?

“Stop it!” I cry aloud, clamping my hands over my ears, even though her voice is

inside my head. “

Stop it, stop it, stop it!”

A sob wrenches from my chest, and the more time that passes, the more convinced I

am that she's right. I almost feel as though I've left my body and am watching all this

take place. I've had out of body experiences before, so I know that this isn't what's

happening, but still – I'm both conscious of how irrational I'm being, but unable to do a

thing to stop myself from spiraling deeper into my fears and insecurities.

When I finally hear Sinclair's footsteps climbing the stairs, the violent fist clenched

around my heart starts to relax, but only just. If he's back it must be to end things. My

wolf wails. I want to shush her, but instead I focus on trying to look as though I haven't

just spent the better part of two hours crying like a baby. I whip the blankets off and

straighten my body, dragging my fingers through my hair and wiping the accumulated

salt from my eyelashes.

So when the door opens and Sinclair walks in, still naked but considerably dirtier than he was when he left, I'm sitting up in bed pretending to read a book. I look up at him, cursing my lower lip for trembling. He certainly looks calmer now, but there's an undeniable tightness around his eyes as he looks me over. He comes over and moves to sit on the edge of the bed, but my wolf sees the dirt on his golden skin and a growl surfaces in my chest. Seeming to understand that he's not allowed to sully my nest, Sinclair reaches his hand towards me, "come take a bath with me." I glance at his muddy feet skeptically, and he sighs. "I'll rinse off in the shower first." "Then why not just shower?" I suggest, not wanting to put myself in a situation where I have to feel his body against mine as he breaks my heart. "Because I want to have a bath with you." Sinclair answers gruffly, "and I can tell you're still upset. We could both use it." "Can we just get this over with?" I huff, Wrapping my arms around myself to hide my trembling." There's no reason to draw it out, Dominic. Just tell me what you decided," His face crumples into a grimace, "Decided about what?" "Whether or not you're going to keep me!" I exclaim, knowing that I'm completely failing in my attempt to seem calm and collected. Just like that, Sinclair's face closes off, and my heart sinks. Oh Goddess, I was right! My wolf howls mournfully. However instead of agreeing to my request,

Sinclair glares
and issues a single command, "Bath. Now."

