

Accidental Surrogate for Alpha

Chapter 186

Ella

I gather Henry, Philippe and Gabriel just after lunch, careful not to hint about my motives for this meeting. Instead I ask them to come to my suite for a chat before returning to their regular daily tasks. Naturally, as my personal guard Philippe would have been here anyway, but when Henry and Gabriel arrive and realize that this is a group discussion rather than a private audience, they automatically sense that something is up – and they're right.

"What's on your mind, Ella?" Henry inquires, wheeling over to take a place beside me.

"I have to ask a favor of you all." I begin hesitantly, knowing that my next request isn't going to go over well at all. "And while I know this puts you in a very difficult position, I'd like to ask that this conversation remain between the four of us – whether you agree to help me or not."

Philippe stiffens, and Gabriel's sharp eyes search my face. "You're asking us not to tell Dominic?"

"Yes, but I swear that I have good reason." I insist, the words spilling out of me in a rush. "You all know what happened in my hypnosis session and how many questions it raised about my past. You know how unprecedented all of this is, and that the events I recalled suggest powerful forces at work." I take a steadying breath to try to stop my voice from shaking. "You must also realize the implications of all this, and how seriously the people are taking these rumors."

The men exchange wary glances. They may be among the few shifters in the palace not treating me like some sort of divine savior, but they'd have to be blind and deaf not to hear the whispers, or notice the worshipful gazes and gifts raining down on me from the pack. "This is so much bigger than finding out who my parents were or why I was given up." I continue fervently. "If that were all it was then I wouldn't mind waiting -I didn't want to do this in the first place." I pause to laugh at the sheer irony of this – how quickly the tables have turned.

"What exactly are you asking, Ella?" Gabriel inquires, sounding genuinely curious rather than cautious.

"Dominic doesn't want me to do any more sessions without him, with good reason. The baby and I will cope better if he's present, and he'll be here to take care of me if things get difficult again." I acknowledge. "But it will also be more stress on him – far more than it is or any of you, because we aren't bonded. The bottom line is that Dominic can't protect me from my past, and he's already got enough to worry about without his wolf going berserk because I have a bad memory and he can't fix it."

"That may be true, but I can tell you right now that this argument isn't going to hold water with us, Ella." Gabriel replies, even though there's a softness in Henry's eyes which I understand only too well. "You are Dominic's Luna, and interfering with any wolves' mate -let alone an Alpha's – is forbidden except in cases of a.buse. What's more, none of us would do or feel differently if it was our own mate in your shoes. I understand you have a tender heart and you're trying to protect him from unnecessary pain, but that would be a disservice to his wolf. It's the Alpha's duty to bear the brunt of the stress and pain for his people, because he has the strength to take it. He'll feel far worse if you do this and he wasn't here for you, than he will if you wait and let him support you through the process."

I glance between the wolves in front of me, who sit with their arms crossed over their chests and wear identical brooding expressions. I decide to change tracks. "Fine, we won't make it about Dominic." I amend. "Perhaps I should have started by saying that we can't afford to wait, regardless of any of our wishes. If the people are right.. if things truly are the way they appear and the Goddess's servants hid me and bound my wolf to fulfill some prophecy in this war, then there isn't any time to waste. We need answers to these questions before we start planning a large-scale invasion, maybe before we even strike the alliance.

"Depending on what we find out, the secrets in my past might change the way we view our opponents. It may alter our entire strategy for the war. It would be folly to move forward with our plans when we know we're missing major pieces of the puzzle. We owe it to our people to do everything we can to bring Damon down, and if I'm part of that then there is no justification for putting this off." I shrug. "Dominic isn't the only one with a duty to put the people above his own needs or desires. If I'm truly to be their Luna, I have to do the same.

The men look more uncertain now, exchanging resigned glances which give me hope I've finally gotten through to them. They know I'm right, even though they don't like it.

"What about the pup?" Henry questions, throwing out one final impediment to my plans.

"This baby survived my first shift- hours of terror and agony that certainly should have killed him.

He got through the memory of having my wolf bound." I remind him, running my palm over my round belly. "I hate upsetting him more than any of you ever could, but he's his father's son. He's strong and healthy, and frankly I don't believe there can be anything worse than what he's already overcome."

"And you?" Philippe questions, piercing me with a knowing gaze. "Your stress is the worst thing for the baby, don't you think it's worth waiting until you can do this under the best possible circumstances?" My stomach flips. Philippe worried me more than Gabriel or Henry from the start, because he knows exactly how tormented I've been by the memories of my first session.

However he's also the one who I absolutely cannot do this without – since he's glued to my side nearly 24/7. In truth, I sought Gabriel and Henry's help to give Philippe permission to defy Sinclair, more than I did to bring them on board themselves.

I silently beg my guard not to reveal my nightmares to the others, saying, "Do you think it's less stressful for me to be floundering in the dark?"

Unsure of whether I might hold something in my memories that can change the course of the war?

Unsure of whether some new demon I didn't even know about is lurking somewhere in my consciousness?" I retort. "Yes, reliving painful things without my mate here is difficult, but it's not nearly as difficult as thinking I might ruin our chances to win this war."

I look down at my belly, wincing, "I love Rafe more than anything, but we're talking about the lives of millions of people. Millions of other children whose parents love them every bit as much as I love my son. Don't you think they're worth our risk?"

Philippe narrows his eyes, and I can see him digging in his heels. Henry and Gabriel, on the other hand, look grave and pensive. "We'll need to think about it, Ella." Gabriel sighs. "And whatever we decide, I don't think we should keep it from Dominic."

"He'll put a stop to it before it can even begin."

Henry interjects, surprising me. "She's right about that. When he makes up his mind there's no changing it.. and it's partly my fault that he's so set against this. I wasn't easy on him about how it went down the first time.... But that was before I understood what we're dealing with." He sighs, scrubbing a hand over his face. "I'm not saying I like it. I agree that it's in all of our interests to pursue this sooner rather than later but I certainly don't approve of sneaking around behind my son's back to make it happen."

Thoroughly scolded, I drop my eyes to my lap. "It's not that I don't believe it's wrong. I do. I know how shitty it is for me to even suggest, but I'm willing to pay the price to my mate. He'll be furious with me, but if it helps the pack then it will be worth it.

The stakes are just too high." I murmur, "Besides, this is my life we're talking about- I have a right to find out where I came from and that isn't anything anyone else can dictate, not even Dominic"

Before they can say another word, the door swings open and Roger strides in, looking grave. Isabel trails behind him, baby Sadie in her arms. "We've got a problem." Roger announces. "The daily shuttle from the continent never arrived. there's a chance Damon has compromised our refugee operation."