

Accidental Surrogate for Alpha

Chapter 188

Sinclair

I lean over the back of the sofa in my quest suite, my hands closed in white-knuckled fists around the frame. My phone is lit up on the table in front of me, Gabriel's name glowing on the screen. Hugo and the Black Alder Alpha, Callahan, stand beside me, looking on with somber expressions. "Talk to me. What do we know?"

"It's bad, Dom." The Vanaran King reports. "My spies say that all signs point to utter ruin. Civilians are fleeing the territories in droves, and the governments they're leaving behind are scrambling. The packs have all fallen to Damon, and the human regimes are considering extreme action to hold off the invasion."

"Do they not realize what they're up against?" I demand. "After all, the upper echelons of government have always known the secret, they know how far ahead our Societies are."

"And they've been planning contingencies." My father interjects. "Sovereigns from other continents are offering their aid, there's been talk of employing weapons of mass destruction... of secret laboratories working for decades on projects inventing next-gen arms capable of combatting our own. They've been preparing for this sort of eventuality since day one."

"And what have they come up with? Any weapon deadly to shifters will also be lethal to humans." I remind them.

"From what we can tell, even the best of their labs haven't come close to matching the sophistication of our technology." Philippe reveals. "They're at least fifty years behind. But that's less important than the likelihood that they'll deploy them anyway. Some we can stop and neutralize- others we shield against, but there are others still that we cannot defend against once they've been deployed, only try to mitigate the damage."

"I'm afraid things are reaching the point where the humans may very well decide to abandon their own people left under Damon's rule, for the sake of taking him out once and for all." Gabriel cautions, answering the second part of my question. "They see them as lost causes, collateral damage."

"That's unconscionable." I snarl. "What kind of leader would contemplate killing their subjects so indiscriminately, as if they're nothing more than pawns in some larger game?"

"It's containment." Ella chimes in, her sweet voice clashing with the harsh words. "They're panicking and they want to fight fire with fire. Damon isn't holding back no matter the impact on the shifters under his rule, and the humans are being faced with the choice between losing some of their populations, or having the entirety enslaved."

"As we said." Roger sighs, "things are worse than we ever could have feared."

"Are the pathways out of the continent still open?"

I inquire, trying to quell my wolf's rabid energy.

Are we still able to bring refugees to Vanara?"

"We need more planes." Dad replies. "One trip a day isn't enough anymore, and we need to allocate more funding to supporting them once they arrive."

"Authorize it." I order, knowing my voice sounds harsh and biting, but unable to help it. "Has there been any word from packs on the other continents? What of the rebellion?"

"Dom, our spies are reporting all the same intel that Gabriel's are." Roger shares, "the rebellion is all but in shambles after this... there's a strong undercurrent of anger and hope among our allies back home... they're eager to fight, but right now our biggest concern is making sure they live to fight another day."

"We've had word from the Veran King." Gabriel adds, referring to the continent west of Vanara.

He's eager to speak with you. Things haven't devolved to violence there or in Sevka, but the humans are in an uproar around the world. They're anxious about our future.. they're willing to offer any help they can to get this under control."

"Thank the Goddess for that." I breathe, even though I don't have the first idea how to do such a thing. The only thing that comes to mind is inventing a time machine and going back to kill Damon before he ever got a chance to put any of his diabolical plans in motion. If I hadn't been such a noble ass we could have avoided all this.

"What are your orders, Alpha?" Philippe inquires, his voice full of belief that I will have some sort of answer. I'm grateful for him, but also at a loss.

"Ella?" I ask, wishing I could see her. "You know the ways of humans far better than we do. Do you have any thoughts?"

There's a short pause, and then her silken voice floats up from the device. "People are afraid, and right now they see us as their enemies... as monsters from horror films who are all cut from the same cloth as Damon. I think the best thing we can do is show them that they aren't suffering alone. Show them that Damon does not reflect all shifters, and that our people don't want him in power any more than they do." Another pause, and I can imagine my mate's beautiful face scrunched up in deep thought. "I think we should extend our rescue operations to include human civilians.

Reach out to every state and local government you can to offer aid, whether it's money or resources, and publicize it. We need shifter allies, but I think human allies might be even more urgent now."

"Well put." Dad praises, "we need to combine PR with diplomacy and hard line action. This isn't just our fight anymore."

"Do it." I agree. "I trust you all, authorize whatever funds and resources we can, and put out feelers to contacts throughout the continent. Forward me any correspondence for approval before sending it out, and have our spies start spreading the word on the ground. Half of Damon's strategy is propaganda and fear mongering, we can counter it with a whisper campaign of our own. Don't let people lose hope, don't let Damon convince them we're enemies. Print up flyers supporting the rebellion if we need to, whatever it takes."

There are a few mumbled agreements, and when a hush falls I turn my attention to the person I want to speak with most. "Can I have a minute alone with my mate please?" I request, though it's actually an order. I listen as the men on Ella's end of the line shuffle out, and wait for the Black Alder Alpha and Hugo to leave as well.

When we're finally alone, I ask. "How are you holding up, trouble?"

"I'm a little overwhelmed." She admits in a soft voice, "I never imagined this could happen."

"I don't think any of us believed Damon would be so reckless." I share, feeling more at ease now that we can speak one on one. "I always knew it would be a disaster if he came to power, but I have to confess this is so much worse than I feared." I don't add that I hate not being able to fix it, because she already knows. "I need to see you tonight."

"I'll try my best." Ella promises with true longing, as though she wants nothing more herself. "I've just been so tired with all the summoning planning and the refugees. I'm out the second my head hits the pillow."

"I know baby." I sigh, feeling guilty even though I know a dream date would comfort us both. "I suppose I shouldn't keep you half awake in dreams all night anyway... I just miss you."

"I miss you too, so does Rafe." Ella relates, "He asks for you- in his own way - about ten times a day."

"Maybe I can record some purrs for you both, so it can feel like I'm there even when I'm not." I suggest.

Ella's breath catches, and I wonder if she's been struggling even more than she admits. "I'd love that."

"Then it's done. As soon as we're off the phone." I vow, wanting nothing more than to spend the rest of our call talking about each other and our pup, but knowing there's still some business left to cover. "How are plans for the summit going?"

"Well, for the most part." Ella reports. "Everyone's looking forward to the ball and Roger is helping me plan some especially sneaky events to win over the reluctant Alphas. Though we're going to have to reevaluate a few things now." She pauses, sounding wistful. "And the Black Alder pack?"

"Alpha Callahan was reluctant to join us this morning." I say ruefully, "but it seems he's had a change of heart, what with the pact being broken expect the Alphas here are going to be much more motivated to help us now, as shifters living among humans are probably going to be looking for an escape - and what better place than the hidden territories?" I glance at the door, recalling the tense conversation I'd shared with the Black Alder Alpha Over breakfast. "Vanara is the last place on earth shifters can exist in secret now, and for the first time in the history of the hidden territories, their own society is at risk because of events in the rest of the world. It's an important wake-up call."

"Then maybe some good can come out of all this pain." Ella assesses sorrowfully.

"I hope so." I agree, wishing I could wrap my arms around her, breathe in her wonderful scent."But for now we just have to wait and see. This is a new world we're living in, and if we can save it then it will be up to us to build a new, hybrid society unlike anything before seen in history."

"And if we can't?" My precious mate squeaks.

"I'm not going to let that happen, Ella." I remark firmly. "I'll die first."