

## Accidental Surrogate for Alpha

Chapter 192

Ella

My nightmares were worse than ever before the night after my second session with Leon, and I wake thrashing in my nest, with Phillippe hovering above me, shaking me vigorously. I shriek and recoil, and he backs away from me with his hands outstretched in apology. "It's okay, I'm sorry." He breathes, "I didn't know how else to wake you."

I gulp in a few gasps of air, trying to calm my racing heart. Rafe sends flashes of concern through our bond, and I immediately grab my phone, turning on the recording of Sinclair's purrs.

This is getting out of hand, Ella." Phillippe scolds, still standing over the bed.

I've got it under control." I insist.

"You don't." He cuts, and I can't, in good conscience, let this continue."

(You're my personal guard, Phillippe." I remind him in the sternest voice I can summon, "It's a very intimate relationship and there has to be trust between us. You hear everything I do, everything I say – whether I'm sick to my stomach or on the phone with my mate. This is a private matter which you are only privy to because of your position and I have to be able to trust you won't betray my privacy, otherwise this arrangement won't work"

I may be your personal guard, but I still answer to the Alpha and he wouldn't approve of this."

Phillippe counters, crossing his arms over his chest.

"You also agreed to help us with the hypnosis behind his back." I remind him, Now do you want to tell him that I ordered you not to say a word about any of it and you obeyed out of respect for our relationship, or do you want to tell him you were fine with being disloyal to him only until you had reason to be disloyal to me?"

Phillippe narrows his eyes, I don't like you very much right now.

'Right back at you." I respond, clambering to my feet. "But I appreciate your honesty."

He growls as I move towards the door. "Where are you going?"

To find someone cuddlier than you." I toss back over my shoulder, pulling on my robe and feeling thankful that I'd gone against Sinclair's wishes and continued wearing pajamas while he's away. Of course, I know he'll be disappointed that I missed another dream date, but when I get lost in my night terrors, there's no way to find him. I pad through the halls to Cora's bedroom, not bothering to tap on the door before entering.

She stirs as I climb into bed with her, moaning sleepily, Ella?"

"Can I sleep with you?" I ask, snuggling up to her and sighing as her arms come around me.

"of course," She agrees without hesitation.

Though I'm surprised you don't want to be in your nest."

"Well I do." I confess, "I just want to be alone less."

Bad dreams?" She guesses, only too familiar with the phenomenon. I nod pitifully, and she takes me by the hand, "Come on, then."

Phillippe rolls his eyes when the door opens again and a bleary-eyed Cora leads me back to my rooms.

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I don't complain when she directs me back into my own bed and climbs in with me, and she doesn't bat an eye when I turn on Sinclair's purrs. «Thank you."

I murmur against her hair. I needed this."

I catch my sister smiling out of the corner of my eye, and I nudge her, What?"

"It's just... this is nice." Cora replies softly. "I mean I'm not happy you're having nightmares, I just like being the one to comfort you for once."

You comfort me all the time." I inform her defiantly.

(Not like this." She murmurs, "You were always the one to Scare away the monsters in our closet. "

(Yeah well, the monsters aren't staying in the closet anymore." I confess miserably.

Do you want to talk about it?" Cora inquires. I shake my head no, and I catch a note of exasperation in her voice. "You don't always have to be such a martyr, Ella. Suffering in silence doesn't help anyone, least of all yourself."

My muscles stiffen. "Is that what you think? That I enjoy playing the martyr? Sacrificing myself to fulfill some self-righteous hero complex?)

(No, I know that's not the reason." She answers apologetically, "but whatever your motives, you do have a habit of hogging all the worst things in life for yourself. You always have."

There's an ironic note in her voice which tells me that she doesn't resent me for it, at least, not the way she had the last time we talked about this.

You're my sister, it's my job to hog the suffering to spare you."

"But I'm older, I'm supposed to be the one looking out for you. Do you have any idea how much I hated myself when we were growing up, how much I still do, because I wasn't strong enough to take care of you." I suspect Cora has done a lot of thinking since our fight earlier this year, because rather than accusing me of making her weak by coddling her, she's admitting that those feelings came from a place of self-doubt.

"It didn't matter that you were older. I'm a wolf." I argue.

"So what, you age in dog years?" She jibes.

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No... I just, I was able to survive things you couldn't ....I don't add that I may have been destined to as well, the way things have been going with my hypnosis.

"But you lost your wolf." Cora declares, surprising me. "Do you think I didn't know?It's all over the palace Ella."

I know that now... then all I knew was that I couldn't stand to see the people I love hurt... I still can't." I muse aloud.

"It's not a bad thing to be selfish sometimes, Elle, to put yourself first every now and then. In fact, it's called self-care." Cora states, rubbing my back.

I've been plenty selfish lately." I confess, thinking of my behavior with Sinclair, and even my thoughtlessness about the human impact of our war, my failure to see how this tumult was affecting Cora. "And part of me enjoyed it, having someone who made me feel safe enough to explore all the things I never had a chance to be growing up.

Dominic has never faulted me – not at my b.rattiest or most needy, he guided me through it all with utter patience. But I think the time for that has passed." I conclude, clamping my eyes shut. "I have a baby on the way, and an entire pack looking to me as a leader now.)

But why does that mean you have to hurt yourself?" Cora inquires. "Why does that mean you have to suffer?"

Because everyone is suffering right now and I'm not special because I have a powerful mate... if the people suffer, I suffer." I explain logically.

"That's all well and good, very noble." Cora assesses. "But how are you supposed to lead them if you're a basket case?"

I won't be permanently." I reason. Dominic will be back in a few weeks, and then I'll feel better."

(This is about so much more than Dominic, Ella."

Cora exhales heavily. "Feeling safe and loved is important. But it can't fix everything you're learning in these sessions, it can't erase everything you've repressed. Only you can do that. You can't keep running from the past and pretending like everything is fine – mark my words it will catch up to you."

I look up at her in surprise, because I haven't shared anything about my hypnosis sessions with her, and as far as anyone knows, there has only been one session. Did Roger say something?"

'No, you silly thing, Cora scoffs. "I'm your sister, I know how you operate."

"Right." I chuckle humorlessly. "silly me."

There's a pregnant pause, and then she asks, "Are you sure you aren't doing all this to punish yourself?"

'No... I'm not sure of anything." I murmur, "Not anymore. I don't even know who I am."

(You've never known that." Cora teases, kissing my cheek.

"Even a penniless orphan is an identity." I reply, "I can't even fall back on that anymore."

Poor darling." Cora croons, "You know if you want to complain about possibly finding out who you are after a lifetime of questions, you might want to do it to someone who isn't bound to die an orphan with all of theirs unanswered."

"Fair point." I giggle, squeezing her. We lie like that for a little while longer, our thoughts spinning with all the challenges facing us. Though Cora hasn't said it this evening, I know she feels as overwhelmed as I do. "What are we going to do, Cora? Everything's such a mess."

"We're together, that's all that matters." She says, echoing the words I've used to comfort her a thousand times before. You and I can get through anything, we had a lifetime of practice, remember?"

I love you." I profess gratefully.

"I love you too, now try to get some sleep. Cora advises. Things always look better in the morning."