

Accidental Surrogate for Alpha

Chapter 195

Sinclair

When I arrive in the dream forest, I'm alone – as I have been almost every night since I left.

However, rather than calling for my mate as I usually do, by picturing her in my mind and willing her to come to me with the sheer force of my longing and determination, I send my power outward. I unleash the full force of my magic, spreading it as far and wide as I can, searching every inch of this enchanted plane of existence. It rolls off of me like a dense fog, ebbing past the limits of my own consciousness to delve through the mating bond and track Ella.

Dreams are strange this way: both closer to and more distant from reality, so that our souls can join when the Goddess's power is at its peak, even as doors to fantastical and surreal worlds swing wide. I don't know where my mate is, but as long as she is also in the realm of dreams, I know I can find her.

It isn't easy. It takes what feels like hours to finally sense her presence, to detect her heartbeat across the vast expanse of ethereal worlds. Finally I find her, though she is very, very far away. To reach her I must travel through dozens of different dreams: some my own, some Ella's, Some a combination of both. It's hard not to pause and get distracted, especially when I come across a shared imagination of us playing with our young son, of the depiction of peace in the united packs and our future on the throne. I'd like to stay in those fantasies forever, but to do so would be to abandon Ella in her time of need.

I also struggle when I come across a sensual vision of Ella and I roleplaying as little red riding hood and the big bad wolf, especially when I realize the dream is hers. Still I forge on, though I certainly make note of the idea for the future.

There are odd things too, like the giant frog telling fortunes for a call-in psychic hotline, or the pirate ship full of ballet-dancing vegetables. Others simply make me smile, like Ella's craving-driven fantasy of a real-life candy land, or my own childhood wish of riding a dragon as it flies through the air on great leathery wings.

Eventually I move through every variation of happy and bizarre dreams, until the sky darkens overhead and the road I'm traveling becomes harsh and cold. I know I'm entering the realm of nightmares now, and I brace myself for the horrors ahead. I ignore the haunting visions that tormented me as a child – the fire that killed my mother, the monsters hiding in my closet. I even manage to move past Ella's youthful terrors – things that would absolutely destroy me if I had to see them for myself.

Her heartbeat and scent draw me deeper and deeper into the darkness, until I can feel her just around the next bend in the path. I expect to find my mate at the mercy of the priests who bound her wolf, but suddenly I find myself in a forest I know all too well – the one where I spent the best days of my childhood. Only this time it's not welcoming and magical, but a vile place full of terror and pain. When my mate finally comes into view, she is not a small girl wrapped in a fiery cocoon. Instead I see a half-starved teenager, injured and dirty, but fighting for her life as two human men bear down on her.

My wolf roars in my ears, and my vision goes red.

Ella

I'm back in the forest.. wolves howling in the distance... pounding footsteps hot on my heels.

Falling, tumbling... crashing into the earth over and over again.

It's happening all over again, the panting breath, the sickening smiles. "Now look at what you've done, you stupid girl."

Two robed figures in the darkness, illuminated in a shaft of moonlight between the trees. Searing pain across my cheek... the horrible knowledge that there is no escape from this violation.

Sickness... my body being dragged. a glint of silver in the leaves. My legs being wrenched apart and my clothes ripping... blind, thoughtless anger, aggression like I've never felt. Blood gushing over me, hot, sticky and metallic. It stains my skin, forever marking me like a grey tattoo, a reminder of what I've done.

Murderer... I'm a murderer... and the priests are still just watching. I try to swing the knife again, only this time my hand is empty. The dagger is gone. I scour the ground for my weapon, but it's gone. I look toward the priests as the second man bears down on me. "The knife!" I shout frantically. "

Where did it go!?"

This isn't right. In my memory I killed them both..I saved myself despite the cost of violence. The priests stay silent, and now the other man is forcing his way between my legs. No! Not this.. not after everything that's already happened. "Please, help me!" I scream, giving up any sense of pride, any bravery. "Please, don't let him do this!"

A fist slams into my face, "I'm going to make you pay for this, bitch." My attacker snarls, gesturing to his dead friend.

"No – please!" I cry, "it wasn't supposed to happen this way, you should be dead."

"Well now you get to die." His face comes into focus over mine, and I can see the pure, sadistic hatred in his eyes. His fingers dig into my flesh, holding me still as he unbuckles his belt. He lashes the leather across my face as it comes free, then uses it to gag me, silencing my screams.

"Ella!" A voice I've never heard... not yet at least. It's deep and wonderful and fills me with warmth, completely out of place in this horrible place. And then there's a great black wolf running towards me through the trees, and I understand. My attacker barely has time to turn before Sinclair clamps his fangs around his throat, ripping his spinal cord from his neck and tossing him aside. He shoves the dead man out of the way, and then he's a man again, dropping onto his knees in front of me.

Sinclair takes my face in his hands, "I'm here, Ella.

You're okay."

"D-Dominic?" I gasp, clinging to him with desperate relief. "Is it really you?"

"Yes, little one" He confirms, though his eyes look past me, to the robed figures in the distance. "It's me. You're safe"

"How did you find me?" I squeak, still in the hoarse voice of my younger self.

"I'm your mate. I always find you, remember?"

Sinclair croons.

He scoops me up into his arms and carries me back the way he came. As we move through the dreamland, the horrible forest of my nightmare slowly transforms. Gone is the blood and horror, the unwelcoming darkness that tormented me so terribly. It's gradually replaced by the glittering woodland of our dream dates, and I feel myself changing too. No longer an injured, frightened little girl, but the woman I am today. I don't know how long it takes, but Sinclair carries me all the way to our dream bed and climbs on, pulling me into his lap, "There now. I've got you, baby. It's Over.

I can't believe this. I didn't really believe Sinclair could follow me through dreams, let alone understand how such a thing was possible. But that doesn't matter now. The moment I feel his muscular arms around me, breathe in his scent, and feel the rumble of his purrs, I unravel. I collapse against him and pour out all the emotions I've been grappling with these past weeks – all the horror, fear and pain. All the confusion, helplessness, and guilt. If I had control of myself I might try to hold some of it back from Sinclair, but I'm beyond that sort of limitation now. Everything is pouring through our bond, and I can feel his sorrow, rage and love rushing back towards me.

He rocks me back and forth, kissing and petting me, whispering sweet nothings in my ear. I cling to him like a raft in stormy seas, and for the first time since that first terrible hypnosis session, I feel as though I'm not completely adrift. Why couldn't he have been there all those years ago?

Why did I have to wait so long before having this man in my life? When my tears have finally slowed and my breathing steadies, I look up at him, "

Thank you." I profess hoarsely. "I don't know how you did it, but thank you."

His thumbs brush my tears away, and he nuzzles my nose with his own before pressing a tender kiss to my lips. There's comfort in his touch, but also despair, and when we part I see tears in his eyes."Don't ever hide something like this from me again, Ella." It's not a scolding, or even an admonishment, the words are full of worry and sadness.

"I'm sorry, I should have told you sooner."I confess, leaning my wet face into the curve of his neck while he caresses my belly. "If I'd known... I never imagined you'd be able to fix it, I thought it would only make things harder for you."

"I'm not just here to fix problems, mate." He purrs.

And if they're harder for you, they're harder for me.

Haven't you been telling me I don't get to share the good and keep the bad all for myself? That goes both ways."

"I'm sorry." I say again, feeling chastised even though there was no bite in his words. "I know we talked about this... I think I'm still just having a hard time with it."

"These things don't go away overnight just because we talked about them. They take work – time and effort for both of us." He pauses, searching my features in a way that makes me squirm. "But Ella, what was that dream?"

I shudder, not able to look him in the eye. "It wasn't a dream, it was a memory."