

Accidental Surrogate for Alpha

Chapter 207

#Chapter 207 – Denial

Ella

When I wake I'm in my nest, hooked up to about a dozen machines and wracking my brains for some explanation of how I got here. Of course... the moment my memory kicks in, I wish it hadn't. My wolf howls in my head, but I shut out the tumultuous emotions threatening to consume me. It might not be healthy, but if there's one thing I'm good at – it's repressing feelings.

I clench my eyes shut. "It's not real, it's not real." I insist to the empty room, reflexively tracing the outline of my womb. "Are you alright, little one?" I squeak, wondering if my pain is about to multiply by a million.

The baby flutters and sends feelings of sleepy confusion through our bond, and the tightness in my heart eases a bit. He's okay. I tell my whining wolf, but we both know she's not just worried for the baby's sake.

They're both okay. My wolf assures me, sounding surprisingly confident for all her nervous whimpering. I don't care what anyone says. We would feel it if he was gone. I would feel it.

But what if he's too far away? I ask, hating myself for the kernel of doubt currently sitting in my stomach like a boulder.

I would still know. She insists. Trust me, no amount of distance could fool me. Our bond is in tact, just out of reach.

Then why are you so worried, I can feel how feral you are. I remind her, praying she's right and that this isn't simply bravado.

Because he's out there alone somewhere and someone just tried to kill him... they succeeded in killing all his men. She answers, and I can feel the truth in her words.

As if we don't know who's responsible. I growl fiercely. This is Damon's doing. I don't know how he managed it, but I will not rest until that bastard is six feet in the ground. Too late I realized I growled out loud, and a man's voice breaks through our private conversation.

"Oh good, you're up." The palace doctor is standing in the doorway, looking at me with the pitying expression of someone who wants to be sensitive but doesn't know how. "You gave us quite the scare, Ella."

Well at least he didn't call us Your Highness. My wolf remarks dryly, noting the trend that far too many of the Vanarans and refugees have recently adopted.

"What happened?" I ask, my hands still resting on my belly. "Is my pup alright?"

"You had what is called a hypertensive crisis." He answers evenly. "At times of extreme stress, your blood pressure can skyrocket to very dangerous levels. In your case it triggered false labor and a dizzy spell which thankfully caused you to pass out before your heart or child could be harmed." He explains. "We've got you hooked up to an IV to get some fluids into your system, and it also allows us to administer anxiety medications and sedatives as efficiently as possible."

"Do I have to go back onto bed rest?" I question worriedly.

"For the time being." He confirms. "I'm very worried about you, Ella. High blood pressure is very dangerous during pregnancy and you're under far too much stress. I know the doctors in Moon Valley diagnosed you with preeclampsia, and when you arrived here we thought that the condition had been mitigated by your wolf waking. But based on the numbers I'm seeing, you're at risk of the condition returning. We need to get your stress levels under control."

"That's easier said than done." I answer sullenly. "We're at war... and my mate..." I know if I tell him that Sinclair isn't dead he'll just think I'm in denial, but I can't bring myself to lie either.

"I was very sorry to hear about Alpha Dominic." The doctor tells me sympathetically. "I know it's hardly a comfort, but his death is a huge loss for all shifter kind."

I can't bring myself to thank him, even though I know he's trying to be nice. I simply nod and glance at the IV. "Do I have a choice about the sedatives?"

He sighs. "You need to rest, Ella. I can't force you to take anything, but I must encourage you to follow my treatment plan for the sake of your child's life and your own. Eclampsia kills mothers and babies... even these days with all the technology we possess. It's not something to mess around with."

"I understand." I murmur, feeling fresh tears well.

"Would you like to tell me what worries you about the sedatives?" He inquires.

"No." I answer stiffly, because telling him would mean admitting that I believe my mate is alive... and how terrified I am that he isn't. The truth is that I'm afraid to go to sleep, because no amount of distance can keep us apart in dreams. My mate can even follow me into my deepest, darkest nightmares... so if I sleep and he isn't there... it will mean he's really gone. That possibility is just too horrible to contemplate.

"Then I'll leave you to rest." The doctor answers, thankfully not seeming offended by my response. "But I hope you'll reach out to me if you have any questions or concerns."

I nod and he leaves. I'd just started to burrow deeper into my nest, seeking the lingering scent of my mate from the last time we lay here together, when Henry and Cora enter the room. They both have tears in their eyes, and Cora immediately comes forward and climbs into bed with me. "You scared me." She murmurs, cuddling up to my side.

"I'm sorry." I profess, kissing her hair. "I'm okay."

Though I'm speaking to my sister, my eyes are locked on Henry. I swear to the Goddess, he's aged ten years in a single afternoon. My heart breaks seeing the pain in his warm eyes, and I reach out to him. "He's not gone, Henry." I whisper, unable to help myself. "I would know if he was."

Henry's eyes fall shut as his handsome features twist into a grimace. "My darling, I don't want to believe it any more than you do, but we can't pretend this isn't real."

"You weren't with your mate when she died, right?" I ask determinedly. "You were away from her, so could you feel it when she passed, even though she was out of reach of your bond?"

Henry sighs, looking as though he doesn't want to answer. "Yes, but that's different... we were fated."

"My bond with Dominic is no weaker just because we chose each other." I argue. "He's told me that it's stronger even than what he shared with Linda."

"That may be so, but it's still different." Henry cautions me. Cora stays silent, snuggling beside me and watching our debate unfold with wide eyes.

"And what of your bond with him?" I demand. "Shifter parents have bonds with their pups from just days after they're conceived. Surely you would feel it if your bond with Dominic was broken? Surely it would hurt every bit as much, if not more than losing your mate?"

As soon as I ask the question, a new fear assaults me... maybe Henry did feel it, and I didn't. I brace myself for a terrible blow, but Henry says. "I saw that wreckage just like you did. We saw the bodies. Whether we can feel it or not, no one could survive that... not even Dominic. I'm afraid he was simply too far away, even the strongest bonds have their limits."

"What are you saying?" I cry. "Why is everyone so ready to believe this! How can you be willing to believe it if there's even the slightest hope?"

"I'm not!" For the first time since I've met him, Henry raises his voice at me, and I flinch in shock and alarm. "That's the last thing I want, Ella! No parent is ever ready to believe their child is gone!" He wheels away from the bed, then back, his face livid with color. "But I can't help Dominic by living in denial – I can't help you or our people by refusing to believe the evidence in front of my face! If he's out there then why haven't we heard from him? You were on the phone with him, he'll know we must all think he's dead, so why hasn't he been in contact, why hasn't the storm forest alpha found him!"

Neither Cora or I make a sound. Our upbringing taught us to freeze and make ourselves as small as possible in the face of this kind of anger. I reflexively try to shield Cora and my belly from Henry, and when he sees the protective movement, he breaks.

"I'm sorry," He utters hoarsely, full of remorse. "I didn't mean to raise my voice. But you have to know that this is a tragedy for all of us. For our family more than anyone else, but a tragedy for the entire continent. No one wants to believe it's real Ella. You're not alone in that, and when you come to accept what's happened, you won't be alone in your grief either... but you need to accept it. Dominic is gone." His voice breaks, tears streaming down his cheeks. "And he's not coming back."