

# Accidental Surrogate

Chapter 246 – Human Camps

Sinclair

I don't depart for the human refugee settlement alone. I take every Alpha I can find, but I take special care to rope in Kieran. The wolf has been shooting me subversive glances since we arrived. He's been perfectly attentive to the shifter refugees, but it's almost as though he's angry I'm making him care about them – that I'm confronting him with their pain.

It's a short trip to the human camps, and we promised the pilots we would return by the scheduled departure time. This only leaves us about an hour to actually get a sense of the situation. Before we arrived I was worried this wouldn't be enough time – afterwards I realize it was too much. The scene is so overwhelming, so distressing that even a few minutes amidst the chaos is overwhelming.

If we'd believed that the plight of shifter refugees was grave, it's nothing compared to that of the humans. After all, the shifters understand why their lives have fallen to ruin, the humans are completely in the dark, and they're not coping well.

We hear the camp before we see it. This isn't much surprise with our supernatural hearing, but the sounds that float to us through the forest are not the desperate cries of people in need. It sounds like a battle.

Eventually we reach the crest of a hill overlooking the sprawling camps – if they can even be called camps. "Holy Goddess." Gabriel says beside me, his dark skin going remarkably pale.

A vast field of black and blue tarps sit in deep mud, propped up on shabby poles and sticks. They're supposed to be tents, but they look more like the squalid dwellings often built by those experiencing homelessness in large cities. The ramshackle structures are on the verge of collapse, and there is no sign of any food or fresh water. The stench is incredible, and it's immediately apparent that there is no one governing this place.

The disconsolate cries of women and children rise through the air in a miserable symphony, while the voices of angry men explode in violent shouts. It seems like there's movement everywhere, but none of it is positive or productive. There are fights breaking out every few feet, people lashing out over the last piece of fire wood, or accusing one another of thefts and attacks.

Utter dread fills me as I wait for the inevitable castigations from the other Alphas. And you want us to bring these wretches into our world? I imagine Kieran saying, with disdain dripping from his tongue. A crash sounds in the distance, and terrified screams break out as the humans whip around, searching for the source of the disturbance. It's coming from the Northern mountains– the opposite direction of the shifter camps – and it sounds like nothing more than a rock slide. However to their ears it must sound like an incoming army, and their fear is so potent my heart aches.

"I've never seen anything so..." Callahan begins, trailing off before he can find the right word.

"Hopeless." Of all the members in our party, Kieran is the very last man I expected to find an ounce of empathy for these people. Still, the pain and concern in his voice is clear, and I find myself even more on edge than before. I can't make sense of his behavior today. One moment he's so tense and on edge, looking around at the other summit attendees with such suspicion and distrust that I wonder what on earth is going through his head. The next moment he's acting as though he actually has a heart, and I don't trust it for one moment. Something is going on with him, whether this latest show of emotion is to throw us off the trail, or he's internally overcompensating for his treachery. I have a terrible feeling that Kieran has not only made his decision about where to pledge his alliance in this war, but that he's chosen the opposition.

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Ella

He's late. The lying fink promised me! But here we are five minutes after the designated landing time and the airfield is completely devoid of planes.

"Something's wrong." I fret, looking back and forth between Henry and Isabel, eager for their perspectives.

"They probably just got caught in a headwind." Henry answers, squeezing my hand. "Flight timetables are an estimate, not an exact science."

I gnaw nervously on my lower lip, focusing on Isabel. Surely she'll support me, I think, with James away as well. "They did radio when they departed the coast." She reminds me, the traitor! "We have no reason to think anything has gone awry."

My wolf grumbles mutinously in my head, and I'm already wracking my brains for some way to go after my missing mate. There aren't any planes left here in the capital – at least, not any that belong to the King. "Do many Vanaran citizens own private planes?" I ask curiously, trying to keep my voice innocent.

"Don't even think about it." Philippe growls from behind me. "For my sake if not your own. Dominic will kill me if I let you anywhere near an aircraft."

"Let me?" I mutter under my breath, my wolf roiling against the idea that anyone but Sinclair should give us orders. "I ought to– look!" I exclaim, interrupting my own train of thought as a dot appears on the horizon, zooming towards us.

"There, you see?" Henry chuckles, "they're just running a little behind."

The wait is much easier then, but still frustrating. The delegation isn't on the first, second or third transports to land, and I realize my noble mate probably waited until everyone else had departed before taking off himself. Finally the last plane taxis over the field, coming to a stop mere meters away. The cargo door starts to descend before the plane has even finished moving, and then Sinclair is there, bounding out onto the pavement.

I throw myself into his open arms, feeling every muscle in my overwrought body finally relax. "Seven minutes, Dominic!" I tell him furiously. "You are seven whole minutes late!"

"I'm sorry, sweetheart." He breathes against my ear, squeezing me so tightly I think I might burst. "But I'm here now." He purrs, "I'm here."

I pull back only far enough to kiss him, tears of relief stinging my eyes. Sinclair hungrily takes my mouth, and he lets his power pour off of him in heady waves. The wolves around us shrink back at the force, but my own inner canine only swoons. I don't understand why he's unleashed his full strength on the airfield, but I'm too caught up in the delicious feel of him to care at this moment. It goes on and on, until everyone around us retreats to the intake tents. Even James and Isabel, who were trying to pretend they didn't want to be wrapped around each other in precisely this way, eventually slip away hand in hand.

It's not until later, when we're alone in our rooms, that he explains himself. First he tells me of the human camps, which devastates and horrifies me in equal measure. It's easy to understand why he would feel so on edge, and as terrible as it sounds I wish that was all there was to his temper. Instead he explains about the Storm Forest Alpha's most recent offenses. "Kieran was acting very odd today." He confesses, sprawled naked beside me in bed. "On edge, cagey, even after the danger had passed and we were on our way back. It set off alarm bells in my mind, so I wanted to remind him of exactly who he's dealing with – just in case."

"Then you mean it wasn't for me?" I pout, my body still flushed from his thorough loving.

"Not entirely." He grins wolfishly, caressing my belly. "I knew you'd enjoy it and I wanted to let go for my own sake, but I also needed to send him a message."

"Well it worked." I assure him. "You should have seen the looks on their faces when they first felt it?"

"Should I take that to mean you were looking at other wolves while I was kissing you?" Sinclair growls playfully, making me squirm with renewed heat.

"I was just curious." I shrug, blushing. "Besides, my wolf liked seeing all those big tough Alphas run away with their tails between their legs." I admit, rubbing my body against him.

"Oh?" He inquires, eyes glinting.

I nod eagerly, unable to hide the sensual pleasure in my voice. "They looked like children compared to you."

"Now you're just flattering me." He teases, kissing my nose. "And if you keep this up then we're going to get distracted and end up late for dinner – which we can't afford. Not with Kieran acting so shifty and the summit coming to an end tomorrow."

My desire is immediately banked. "You think he might betray us?"

Sinclair grimaces, "I think he's hiding something... and we need to find out what it is. We don't have much time left."