

# Accidental Surrogate

Chapter 248 – To War

Ella

I'm dying.

The strength and determination it requires to stay serious in the face of Kieran's announcement is staggering. I want nothing more than to roll on the floor laughing, but something tells me that doing so would undermine this victory.

I can feel Sinclair's mirth through our bond, though he looks as cool and intimidating as ever. You brilliant, devious, glorious little minx! His voice sounds in my mind, full of all the laughter missing from his face.

I send him an elated giggle in return. The only thing better than getting to see how embarrassed he is by that delivery, is knowing that Damon is getting the blame. I share, my pulse racing with excitement. You notice Kieran didn't tell him no? He asked about strategy and 'didn't commit', but he never refused him... how much do you want to bet he was genuinely considering the option before getting so mercilessly insulted?

I know. Sinclair confirms, positively glowing with pride. I think your prank just stole a powerful ally right out from under Damon's nose, trouble. I have no doubt Kieran was tempted and just needed to confirm it was a safe bet... but he'll never work with Damon now.

No wonder he was in such an odd mood today. I reflect, wishing this dinner would end so we can go celebrate.

I can sense Sinclair preparing to stand and thank Kieran for his allegiance, to deliver a speech inspiring the other pack leaders to make their own pledges. The momentum is on our side, and Kieran was our most difficult sell – if he's on board it's only a matter of time for the others to join as well. We can both feel that this is the opportunity we've been waiting for, the perfect time to go big or go home.

However before Sinclair can move, the FrostFang Alpha stands as well. "I admit, I have my opinions about the way you handled this, Kieran." He begins, giving the other wolf a piercing look. "But I cannot fault the conclusion at which you have arrived. I was inclined to lend my support to this effort from the beginning, but this week has surpassed anything I could have imagined." His gaze swings to me, "Ella, your wisdom and grace – your compassion for all those affected by Damon's violence and greed – is an inspiration. You are living evidence of the Goddess's wishes for our future, but you are more than that too, because I'm certain that you would never join an unworthy cause. To oppose you would be to oppose justice, and I have no wish to betray my values that way."

The Alpha forges on, turning now to Sinclair. "Dominic, I have always admired your dedication to your people, as well as your unflagging principles. But meeting you, seeing your strength and feeling the magnitude of your power first hand, has been a humbling and heartening experience. I'm certain I have never, and will never, meet another wolf of your caliber – unless perhaps it is your son." He allows with a genial smile, nodding to my round tummy. "You have never sought to pressure or manipulate us despite the urgency of your campaign, you have only worked to educate us about the threat Damon poses, and allowed us to bear witness to the events on the ground."

"You have done very well. Because even if I did not feel so warmly towards you and your Luna, the things we have seen and the stories we have heard over the last few days would have been more than enough to convince me to oppose the usurper." His countenance hardens as he surveys the other pack leaders, many of whom are nodding in agreement. "Any wolf who would cause his people such torment is not fit to lead. Any Alpha who would risk the existence of all shifters by breaking the secrecy pact – who has overturned our way of life for the last thousand years – cannot be allowed to gain power. And any King whose avarice is so great that he cannot be content with a single empire, will turn on his allies as soon as his enemies are defeated. And when that time comes, there won't be anyone left to help those who stood with him."

The FrostFang Alpha is clearing gearing up for a big finish, his volume rising with his passion. "We saw Damon's vision for the future today in revolting detail, and I for one have no intention of letting him spread that nightmare any farther than he's already managed. We must do whatever is in our power to defeat him, so I too pledge my allegiance to Dominic and Ella, and I charge any Alpha who would refuse to do the same as a traitor."

Cheers and growls of agreement rise up around the table as the other Alphas stand one by one, each wolf declaring his commitment to defeating Damon. Soon Sinclair, Gabriel, Roger, Henry and I are the only ones seated, and I think we're all a little surprised by the sudden wave of support. I suppose this has been building all along and it's just been difficult to read because of their expert poker faces, but then again, maybe today was a turning point? Maybe even the hardest of hearts cannot stand before such suffering and remain unmoved. Maybe they were waiting for Kieran to choose a side first, so that they wouldn't be alone if they refused to help... maybe a simple and diabolical prank accomplished what no words ever could.

"Well damn," Sinclair observes, smiling broadly. "I thought I was going to have to make a speech. You kind of stole my thunder, Ethan." The group laughs heartily, and Sinclair gracefully rises, buttoning his suit jacket as he raises his glass. "I must admit I'm incredibly moved by your support. I'm infinitely grateful to have your allegiance, and I vow that I will do everything in my power to honor your sacrifices and live up to your expectations." He squeezes my hand, and I can feel pure love rushing through our bond.

"I have always considered this war to be so much bigger than us – than our pack and our people. I wish that wasn't the case. I wish that Damon was not the monster he is, that he was not such a threat. I wish that he hadn't cost us all the lives he's stolen and destroyed." Sinclair's eyes are shining now, and I send him a flood of encouragement, needing to overwhelm his guilt with support. "But I could not wish for better allies than the wolves in this room, and I promise to never take you, or your people for granted. My hope is for our refugees to leave your shores one day soon, but I assure you that even after we are gone, we will never forget the kindness and support you have shown us. We will never be able to repay you for your generosity, and you will always have friends on the Royal Continent."

Gabriel stands too now, raising his own glass. "To our alliance – to ridding the world of Damon, and building the future the Goddess envisioned for us when she brought this wonderful she-wolf into the world." He smiles, gesturing to me.

The others echo his toast, and I steal a single sip of Sinclair's wine to seal the verbal agreement we've all made. I can't wait to go back to our rooms and talk about all of this, but my mate isn't finished yet. He turns to the Storm Forest Alpha, a lethal expression on his handsome face. "Kieran, did you ever tell Damon whether you would join him – one way or another?"

The wolf in question flushes again. "No, but I swear on my mate's life, my allegiance is yours."

"Oh no, I believe you." Sinclair reassures him, "I was actually thinking that there might be an opportunity for us to infiltrate the enemy camp. I have spies on the ground of course, even a few who have won prominent roles in his employ. But Damon needs more fighters, I'm sure he wants your army and it could be very advantageous for us to have a double agent commanding his reinforcements."

"You're saying that you want me to go back to him and accept?" Kieran clarifies.

"That's exactly what I'm saying." Sinclair confirms, a devious glint in his eye. "Tell him you thought about it and decided that the Vanaran throne is worth the risk, but you want to be intimately involved in his war planning efforts if your own mens' lives are going to be on the line. Pretend you're on his side, collect whatever intelligence you can, undermine his plans whenever possible, and set your soldiers against his when the time comes for battle." He pins the Alpha in his crosshairs, practically daring him to refuse. "Are you up for it?"

Kieran levels him with a blazing look, filled with bloodlust and an unmistakable thirst for vengeance against the wolf who insulted him so badly. "It would be my pleasure."