

Accidental Surrogate

Chapter 249 – Decisions

Sinclair

What started as a regular dinner party quickly evolves into a marathon planning session for the war, extending late into the night. I summoned James and my top enforcers as soon as the alliance was confirmed, because even though we’ve just clinched a major victory, the truth is that the hardest work is still ahead of us. In addition to coordinating Kieran’s mission as a double agent, there are a lot of logistics to sort out in terms of mobilizing combat forces and choosing tactical strategies.

In hindsight I realize I should have familiarized the delegations with the military minutiae from the beginning, but I hadn’t wanted to risk compromising classified information without confirming their loyalties first. Now I’m paying the price of that caution, as there’s a great deal of ground to cover simply to get everyone caught up on the same page. Still, I’m elated to have the combined armies of the Vanaran packs at our disposal. In addition to the resistance forces coalescing back home, our numbers should now be more than double the soldiers employed in Damon’s imperial army – and that’s not to mention the Vanaran technologies we’ll now be able to employ.

Everything is finally coming together, and I’d be lying if I said I don’t feel entirely impatient to launch our first true attack. Ella is helping me remain patient, simply by the virtue of my wolf refusing to be separated from her any sooner than we’ve already planned. It’s a good thing too, because I know rushing home in a fiery rage is a recipe for disaster. We have to put ourselves in our opponents shoes; get inside Damon’s mind and anticipate his every move, then account for each potential complication until we have a protocol for every contingency.

Ella is barely awake by the time we finally finish discussing our next steps. I tried to convince her to go up to bed an hour ago, but she only climbed into my lap and dug her proverbial paws in. I didn’t have the heart to set her away from me, and I figured there was a better chance of her sleeping with me than without me. I’m not even sure she’s aware when we decide to call it a night.

I carry the drowsy bundle up to our suite, pangs of tenderness radiating through my chest every time she emits a sleepy murmur and snuggles closer, burying her face in the curve of my neck. I try my best to undress Ella without disturbing her slumber, but it’s no use. She blinks up at me with heavy-lidded eyes as I slide her dress down over her hips, one small hand extending towards my face. I pause so she can stroke my jaw, wondering if there’s ever been such a sweet mate before, then deciding such a thing is impossible.

“I’m so proud of you.” She utters, her speech only slightly slurred. “You were brilliant tonight, Dominic.”

“You were the brilliant one.” I reply, kissing her palm and finally pulling the gown from her delectable body. “You played Kieran like a fiddle, and you had every other wolf in that room hanging on your every word.”

“I just lured them in, you’re the one who they’ve chosen to follow.” She replies, summoning a beatific smile. “All those big tough wolves deferring to your strength, anxiously awaiting your directions and guidance, even above their own King’s? That’s not nothing, my love.” Her silken voice is low and husky, her gold eyes limpid pools. I know, even without scenting her arousal, that my little wolf found no shortage of excitement in watching me take charge of that room.

“Oh?” I croon, slipping her heels from her poor, swollen feet. I begin massaging the soles, and Ella moans in relief as my knuckles knead her sore muscles. “So my little troublemaker enjoyed seeing me boss everyone around, hmm?”

She flushes and giggles softly, but her face is solemn when she continues. “I’m serious. It’s a testament to just how much they respect you – we couldn’t ask for a higher endorsement.” Ella smiles again, lighting up my whole world. “It’s why you deserve to be King... wherever you go, the most powerful shifters bend the knee of their own free will. You don’t use threats or intimidation, you simply walk the walk and they fall in line.” She muses, “It’s very impressive.”

I know Ella is expressing genuine admiration – that she wants to make sure I take credit for this accomplishment – but I’m feeling much too triumphant for thoughtful reflections. My wolf wants to celebrate, and what better way could there be to mark this occasion than playing with our mate?

“So it didn’t turn you on?” I tease, sliding my hand up her velvety thigh and pulling aside the sodden gusset of her panties. Ella shudders as my fingers connect with her needy sex, sinking right into her slick folds. “This sweet pussy is certainly dripping – do you mean to tell me it’s not for me?”

“It’s always for you.” Ella answers breathily, her voice catching when my thumb finds her sensitive clit. “Only you can do this to me, Dominic.” I might think she’s simply going along with the subject change to please me, except that I can feel just how profoundly my touch addles her thoughts, derailing anything she might have wanted to say next.

I purr with barely restrained pleasure, my cock going rock hard before Ella is even finished speaking. “Very good.” I praise, pulling away the last of her undergarments. Her eyes dip to the hard member between my legs, and my wolf howls through our bond when she licks her lips as if the mere sight has made her salivate. I’m still lazily petting her most intimate flesh, drinking in every tiny sound and movement she makes as the feelings wash over her.

Ella is perfectly alert now, but I cease touching her when her eyes fall shut. “Are you sure you’re not too tired for this, little mate?” I ask, eyes narrowed in concern. “We just just go to sleep if you are.”

Her eyes snap open. “No, I’m awake.” She answers, responding so quickly I have to smother a smile.

I don’t budge my stern expression, and Ella’s pupils dilate with obvious desire, “Prove it, baby.” I instruct her, making my voice as deep as possible. “Don’t take your eyes off of me for even a moment. If you do, everything stops. I want to see you come to pieces for me.”

She gulps and nods, gnawing on her plump lower lip as she waits for me to continue stroking her. I don’t disappoint, and soon the only sounds in the room are Ella’s ecstatic whimpers and my rumbles of pure satisfaction.

The next morning we both find it difficult to believe the summit has reached a successful conclusion, before the scheduled events have even been completed. Of course, Ella also doesn’t know that tonight’s ball is going to double as our surprise mating ceremony, and though my mind is finding it difficult to think of anything else, hers is still sharply focused on politics.

“I was thinking,” Ella says, leaning back against my chest and trailing her hands through the sea of bubbles filling our bath. “We ought to focus some efforts on encouraging Damon’s men to turn against him. Not his top advisors or anything, but the footsoldiers in his army. They’re being ordered to commit atrocities and some of them might not have a problem following those commands, but I have to think that others are waiting for any opportunity to desert.”

“That’s a good thought.” I nod in approval. “We’ve had quite a few reports of imperial soldiers joining the resistance already, but if we offer amnesty to the rest then we might be able to incentivize more wolves to change sides.”

“The only thing I don’t like about it is that they shouldn’t need an incentive to betray a leader as dishonorable as Damon.” Ella sighs, “if anything turning traitor is a sign of virtue.”

“It’s not that simple.” I remind her, though I know she doesn’t need it. “Warriors are taught to follow orders no matter what, many have no way out, and the penalty for dereliction of duty is execution. Too many of those wolves have families to support, it makes taking the risk untenable.”

“You wouldn’t commit war crimes even if the cost was your life.” Ella counters, sounding rather petulant.

“Not my life.” I confirm, “but if it might cost me you or Rafe? If my death meant abandoning you in a world like the one Damon has created?”

“You would find another way.” Ella insists, leveling an adorable glare at me over her shoulder.

“I would try to find any alternative I could, but none of us ever know how far we’d go to protect the people we love until we’re put to the test. I know myself well enough to understand that I’m capable of doing terrible things if I feel like I have no other choice.” I exhale heavily, thinking about the future now. “Besides, when this war is over all of these shifters are going to have to find a way to go back to living side by side with those their former enemies. We can’t imprison everyone... we’re going to need compassion and empathy then more than ever.”

Ella frowns, “but we can’t just smooth over atrocities.” She reasons, “We can’t tell people to kiss, make up and pretend like it never happened – like they weren’t traumatized or they didn’t lose loved ones and livelihoods.”

“We won’t.” I promise. “But justice doesn’t necessarily mean punishment. Everyone caught up in this mess is merely trying to survive, however they can. We will all have committed offenses against other shifters and humans by the time this is over.” I run my hand over her belly, smiling as Rafe kicks against my palm. “That’s why we need you so much, Ella. I can kill Damon, but I can’t heal our peoples from wounds that run so deep. You’re the only person I know who has that power – just look at what you did for me and Roger. Look at what you’ve overcome yourself.”

Her lashes fall shut as the gravity of my words sink in. “That’s a really big job for one woman, you know.”

“I know.” I murmur, kissing her neck. “But I believe in you. And this little munchkin believes in you.” Rafe kicks in agreement, and I scent the faintest hint of tears. “Now let’s not talk about this any more today.” I suggest, “We have way too much to do.”

“I thought the only event today was the ball?” Ella asks, confused. “That’s hours and hours away.”

I offer her my most wolfish grin, “Well my beauty, you thought wrong.”