

Accidental Surrogate

Chapter 260 The Goddess

Ella

Seeing the Goddess again is like something out of a dream. Naturally, my memories of our first meeting have been restored, but the events my hypnosis sessions uncovered feel slightly different from my other memories – less solid, more malleable and illusive. This feels much the same. There's a surreal ambience in the air as the doors to the inner temple swing open, and it only grows stronger when the Goddess appears.

At first, there is only light. It pours forth from the expanding entryway in a blinding aura, forcing me to avert my gaze. Beside me, I feel Cora throw up a hand to block this show of celestial brilliance – not that it does much good. I feel as though my skin is on fire, and then a strange pressure deep in my chest. I feel as though something inside me is cracking open, and I instinctively fold in on myself, trying to keep it closed. Philippe is muttering worried questions by my side, his strong hand on my elbow, but I can't bring myself to look at him.

My attention is locked on the being now framed in the doorway of the gleaming inner temple. The overwhelming light has dissipated now, leaving only the beautiful woman from my memory. I lift my gaze to her face, still grimacing with the effort of keeping myself in one piece. She's exactly as I remember her: too magnificent to take in all at once, and yet so fascinating that I could easily get lost in a single one of her features and never grow tired. There's the same starlit hair, galaxy eyes and pearly skin. But this time when our eyes meet, I feel a new pulse from that cracked place inside me. Oddly enough, it reminds me of my bond with Rafe.

The shock of this realization staggers me, so much so that I lose control and stop trying to cement the burgeoning crack. At once the walls seem to collapse, and suddenly I'm feeling a third bond in addition to Sinclair and Rafe's. It's filled to bursting with love and power, and a great many things I don't understand. The link is so replete with magic that I feel a bit drunk, but I know I have to keep going.

My wolf inches forward, testing the new channel in our consciousness. It's every bit as strong as those I share with my son and mate, though alarmingly vast and unfamiliar. I know the feel of my boys with my eyes closed, but pinpointing a single shape, emotion or thought from the Goddess is impossible. It's daunting – but not unpleasant. I can feel so much warmth and affection radiating towards me, with the same sort of unconditional fervor I feel for my unborn pup. It fills me with a sense of safety, security and belonging, in ways no one else has been able to provide for me. Tentatively, I send a single question through the bond and hold my breath as I wait for an answer. The Goddess hasn't looked away from me once since she arrived, and now she floats forward, her cascading gown trailing over the hallowed ground. "Yes, Ella." She confirms with a tender smile, her shimmering hand cupping my cheek. "This is what it feels like to have a mother."

Her touch is so soft and nurturing that tears sting my eyes, and all I want to do is throw myself into her arms. I don't, unsure of what is appropriate and how I'm even supposed to behave in this situation. However the Goddess obviously senses it, because she wraps me up in her willowy arms, "I've been waiting for this day for longer than you know." She murmurs in my ear. "Even before you were conceived, I have always looked forward to meeting you, my daughter."

"But we already met." I sniffle, nuzzling her shoulder and taking the opportunity to breathe in her scent. I almost regret this, because her aroma is a terrifying blend of everything in the universe.

All the life her light created is now embedded in her pores, competing for attention and rushing to the surface in microscopic bursts. There are plant and animal smells, as well as those of minerals and chemicals – and then about a million things I don't think I want to know about.

"I know," The Goddess answers, pulling away to look down at me with a serene smile. "You were so tiny and precious, but it was only a blip in time. I want to know the woman you've become."

"Will we have the opportunity for that?" I inquire warily, "Reina, Silas and Pollux keep telling me I'm too late."

She sighs, "We have a lot to talk about, my darling. And you've only just arrived. Wouldn't you like a rest?"

"No." I counter, tempted to put some distance between us, but unable to release her. "I'm too hyper to ever sleep now. I need to know what's happening."

"Very well then." The Goddess concedes, "Reina?" She sweeps her hand towards the inner temple, and one by one we file inside. I introduce Cora, Roger and Philippe, and I'm infinitely grateful that they continue to refuse to leave me alone with these mysterious characters, no matter how many times they're asked.

"Where should we begin?" Reina inquires once we're all seated and drinking a fresh brew of tea. "I know where." I declare. I've been keeping the former queen in my periphery this entire time, and I didn't miss the pain in her eyes when she witnessed our reunion. "I want you to know that I think what you did to Reina is horrible." I begin, leveling a scowl at my mother. "To grant her wish only to rip it all away? It's unforgivable. And why did you tell me Reigna was one of my mothers if she wasn't?"

The Goddess arches one silvery brow, cocking her head to the side as she observes me. "Wasn't she? She loved you, sheltered and carried you. She sacrificed her body and her freedom once she lost her husband, and all for you."

"You know what I mean." I counter, taking Reina's hand in my own. I wish I had a way to communicate my appreciation and affection for the she-wolf beyond small touches, but at this point it's the best I can do."

"I needed you to find this place, Ella." The Goddess replies, her voice light and airy. "You had to come looking for Reina, so that we could have this meeting. So that we can begin your training." "I don't understand." I confess, reaching for Cora with my free hand. She quickly cuddles up to my side, surrounding me with support. "Why couldn't you carry me yourself?" I inquire, glancing apologetically at Reina. "Not because I wanted you too... I just don't understand?"

"I do not create life in the same way humans and shifters do." The Goddess shares. "I can dream entire worlds into being, but the only being capable of impregnating me would be the God of Darkness. And it would have meant an immortal child – one who could never know what it truly means to be human."

"Oh." I muse, wondering if any of this will ever begin sounding believable.

"The world doesn't need another god with more power than they know what to do with." The Goddess continues, looking around at us all. "I needed a child with shifter blood and my power in one. So the best I could do was implanting one of my eggs in Reina, and giving Xavier a push to her bed."

"And everything that happened after?" I ask, not trying to disguise the pain in my voice. "The orphanage? Binding my wolf? Those visits from Silas and Pollux! What on earth was the deal with that knife in the forest?"

—

"You know some of the answers already." My mother reminds me softly. "We needed you to know what it meant to be human, but it wasn't enough to merely leave you with them and binding your wolf. We knew you had my power. We knew you had the experiences to give you perspective – but we had to find out if you were capable of uniting our worlds, and that part has nothing to do with power or perspective. It's about you. We didn't know your heart or who you would become." "But I thought this was the whole reason I was born!" I exclaim, needing to make sense of this. "It was a hope." The Goddess replies. "I am not omniscient, and I do not control the workings of men. I knew a child of your lineage and experience would have the potential to save your people, but the rest was up to you. We needed to see if you would fight, if you would protect and sacrifice your own needs for others. Luckily you grew up to be the woman I hoped, but none of this is guaranteed."

"Alright," I swallow, deciding to wait and process all of this later. It's simply too much to compute in this moment. "So... what training? What am I supposed to do? If it's not about magic —"

"If we can win the war, your heart will bring our people together, not your power." She answers evenly, "but to win the war? Damon is not as weak as you may think, Ella. Your mate is going to need your help, and that means learning how to use your magic – and we hardly have any time left."

"I still don't understand." I whimper, wishing Sinclair was here.

—

"That's okay, my love." The Goddess runs her fingers through my hair almost absentmindedly. "All will be clear in time. Now – Are you ready to begin?"