

Accidental Surrogate

Chapter 261 – No Boys Allowed

Ella

“I’m ready,” I reply, straightening my shoulders and sitting up, away from my mother, who is also the Goddess. “What do I need to do?”

“You must go,” she urges, her eyes clear and untroubled despite the turmoil in mine. “Into the desert beyond this temple. There, I can communicate more clearly, more fully. I will make your path clear to you.”

“Seriously?” I cry, wrinkling my nose in distaste and looking over my shoulder to where the desert surely waits. “Out into the desert? It’s not something that we can do here, in the comfort of this really nice temple?” My wolf inside me howls at the idea – she wants trees and shade and cool damp places, not the hot desert sun.

The Goddess smiles at me and shakes her head lightly, her glowing blonde hair shaking over her shoulders. “No, my child,” she intones. “You must learn the lessons that this earth has to teach you, and it’s not something you can glean from a structure built by man.” Her eyes drift, then, to my stomach, where my child is growing. “It will be dangerous for you,” she whispers. “You are weaker than you think, girl.”

My stomach sinks at her words and my hands fly to my stomach, instantly wanting to protect my little boy. “Will it...will it hurt him? To learn what I need to know?”

She looks at me evenly, not giving a hint of affirmation or denial. “The future is not written, my child,” she whispers, her voice soft. “Your body is weak, but your child is strong. Your time in the desert will be a trial, your deliverance of my gift to your people will be worse. It is your choice, whether to take these risks upon your body. And in the end, there is no guarantee that it will work. You are...late. The war is well progressed. Those against whom you fight are strong.”

I look around the room at everyone, all of their eyes and their hopes trained upon me in this instant. My hands move over my stomach as I look each of them in the face, but my heart is with my little boy – our little boy, mine and Sinclair’s. This miracle we made together.

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I would do anything to save him, to keep him safe. This I know as a truth as deep as my soul, deep as my love for Sinclair. But I think as well of the world he’ll grow up in if I do nothing. A world torn apart by war, in which he will always be hunted, always be a target. And one day he’ll grow big and strong, like his father – big enough to take it all on. But until then, when he is just an innocent child...

Until then, it’s my job to fight for him.

“All right,” I choke out, my fear as well as my determination shining on my face. “All right, I’ll do it. Let’s go.”

My mother gives me a soft, worried smile and leans forward, taking my face in her glowing hands. “I will be with you every step,” she murmurs, her voice soft enough that I’m the only one to hear it. “Do not doubt that I am there, guiding you, little one.” Then, pressing a kiss to my forehead, she begins to glow with a fierce, burning light.

As she pulls away, she turns to Cora and gives her a bright smile. Cora blinks her surprise, shocked to be singled out by the Goddess. And then, all at once, the light is blinding, forcing all of us to close our eyes against the glare. When we open them again, the Goddess is gone and the room is cast in relative darkness.

“What!” Cora cries, jumping to her feet and looking around. “But she didn’t give us any instructions – what are we supposed to do!?”

“No,” I whisper, shaking my head at my sister. “No, I know what to do.” I press my hand to my forehead, where the goddess had pressed her kiss. With it, she gave me her love, but also all of the instructions I need to carry us forward. “Come,” I order, getting to my feet definitively. “We have far to go, and not much time.”

Everyone stands, ready for action, ready to follow me out into the desert to meet whatever the Goddess holds for us there.

In the end, we don’t all go into the desert. Instead, it is only Cora, Regina, and I who prepare to set out into the sands. Roger puts up the biggest fuss at being left behind, of course.

“I can’t let you go out there alone,” he growls at me, though his eyes are on Cora the whole time. “I promised Dominic that I’d keep you safe –”

“It doesn’t matter what you promised,” Regina intones evenly, coming over to us when she hears him putting up a fight. “This desert is sacred to the Goddess, it is no place for a man.” She looks him up and down, a bit of a sneer on her face.

“And them?” Roger snaps, throwing an arm towards the priests who work the temple. “You’re going to tell me that they’ve never been out there?”

Regina glances calmly over at the priests and then turns her gaze back to Roger. “They are castrati,” she says, raising her eyebrows. “Unless you’d like to join their number...?”

I burst out laughing at this and slap a hand over my mouth to muffle the sound. It feels wrong, somehow, to laugh like that in the goddess’ temple – but the look on Roger’s face when Regina so casually offered to take his balls away –

I glance at Cora and almost lose it again when I see that she’s also holding back her hysterical laughter.

Regina raises disapproving brows at us, but walks quickly away to where preparations are being made, to busy to scold.

“Well, Roger?” Cora asks, crossing her arms and smirking at him. “You gonna...lighten your load? And join us out in the sand?”

I hear the growl deepen in my mate’s Beta’s chest and take two steps towards him, putting my hands on his arm and looking up at him with my sweetest sisterly gaze. “Come on, Roger,” I coax. We need someone to ready the ship, anyway – when we get finished with what we have to do out there, we’re going to need to move. Fast.”

Cora says nothing, just continues smirking, even when he turns his heavy gaze on her. I see the longing in his eyes, the worry that’s not simply the assignment given to him by his brother, but the worry of a wolf for the woman he loves. Looking between them, I can feel his anxiety in the air, as well as Cora’s daring. If Cora had a wolf, I know that right now it would be crouching in her mind, her hackles raised, her tail slowly wagging, thinking come get me.

But, as much as I’d like to see this play out, we’re out of time. “Well, whatever,” I breathe, stretching my arms over my head and pretending a nonchalance I don’t feel. “If you want to come, Roger, we’ll see you out back once you’ve had your uh –” I flick my eyes to his crotch, letting my gaze linger there, “load lightened.” Then I look back up at him with a big smile. “Otherwise, we’ll see you at the boat!”

I turn, moving to Cora and wrapping my arm around hers, pulling her away with me.

“How long will it take?” Roger calls after us, his hands sunk angrily in his pockets.

I look over my shoulder and shrug at him. “Honestly?” I say, shaking my head. “I don’t know. Hours. Days. Weeks? It will take as long as it takes,”

He growls again and opens his mouth to reply but Regina opens a door at the back of the temple, waving us forward towards the dark room there.

“Come,” she demands, lowering her brows at us. “There is no time for this nonsense. We have work to do.”

Nodding, chastened, Cora and I duck through the low lintel of the door, into the coolness of the dark room. But I don’t miss the glance Cora sends to Roger over her shoulder. The one that promises a return, no matter how long it takes.