

# Accidental Surrogate

Chapter 265 To the Temple

Ella

As soon as the boat pulls up to the dock, I'm by the gangplank, eagerly waiting for the sailors to lower it. One of my hands rests on the underside of my swollen belly, holding my child close. The doctor that Sinclair assigned to come with us examined me the moment we stepped foot onboard after our trek home from the desert and confirmed that Rafe's heartbeat is still there, though fainter than he'd like.

I need to get off this boat, now, I think, my eyes wide as I watch the sailors hurry to lower the plank so that I can scurry off of it. I have a job to do, and the sooner it's done, the sooner I can rest.

Stop, my wolf begs inside of me a word I don't think I've ever heard her say. She's usually run!, or fly! or go! Never stop, caution, wait. But today, I can feel her pacing inside me, worried.

We are weak, she cautions. The pup...

I can't, I growl back at her, impatiently watching the plank finally touch the dock next to us. We have a job to do – we have to help everyone survive

"Ella!" Cora calls, running out of the boat's small cabin. "Ella, wait!"

I turn to her, my face fierce. "Either come with me or stay here, Cora," I warn, my eyes flashing. But you can't hold me back –"

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"Ella," she says, grabbing my arm as I put my foot on the gangplank, ready to rush forward." Please, you barely made it out of the desert – you are not well enough for this – your doctor ordered you onto bedrest weeks ago – he told you to walk no more than forty minutes a day! You're risking your health, your child!"

"And if I don't?" I bite out, spinning on her. "How many will die, if I don't get to that temple and deliver the Goddess's gift?" My eyes fill with tears and my lip trembles as I look my sister in the eye, my hand still pressed against my poor child. "Are their lives worth less than mine? Worth less than my child?"

"Yes," Cora says, and I can see her guilt as she utters the word. "At least, to me – Ella, I can't see you harmed like this –"

"Then stay," I declare, ripping my arm from her hand. "Don't watch. But you can't stop me."

Cora is right, of course I am weak, perhaps too weak to do this. But I can't not not anymore, not knowing what I know. I can do so much good if I can only get to those temple steps...

Free of her grasp, I hurry down the gangplank and am surprised to hear footsteps following me. When I stand firmly on the dock, I turn, my eyes going wide when I see Cora hurrying after me.

She shrugs when her feet too hit the wood.

"I can't let you go alone," she protests. "If you insist on killing yourself, I'm going to be there to witness it. You idiot."

I nod, ignoring the insult, and feel honestly a little lighter now that I have my sister at my side. I turn and as one we head out into the streets.

"Cora! Ella!" We hear Roger's voice call out behind us, but neither of us turn. If he wants to stop me,

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he's going to have to chase me, and damn it – weak or not – I'm faster than him. Cora and I pick up our pace, determined not to waste any more time on negotiations.

We plunge through the city, which is filled with smoke and rubble. I'm horrified by what I see. Some houses look almost untouched while others are in total ruin. Whole neighborhoods which I used to walk through are demolished, their beautiful tree-line streets ripped to shreds. It's horrible to see what Damon has done to this place, what the humans have been pushed to in order to keep hold of their freedom.

But if I do this right, if I can get there....damn it, but I can make a difference.

I caught a little sleep on the boat on the way here. My anxiety kept it light, kept me from the dream state that would have allowed me to speak to Sinclair if he, too, were dreaming. It was a huge disappointment, not to have been able to talk to him. Just one word from him, one embrace, one press of his hot mouth to mine

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It would have given me such strength.

Instead, I feel my weakness in each of my steps. I feel as if I could sleep for days, my adrenaline the only thing that's keeping me going. And of course – of course I know that my poor baby is the one paying the price of all of this. It's the cause of all of my anxiety, the only thing that I thought about during the long trip here. The all-encompassing question that kept me up at night: was my child the price we would pay for peace? And then, was it a price I was willing to pay?

Every motherly atom within me screams no, but the human in me – And yes, the human. Biologically, I am wolf, but I was raised as a human on purpose, so that in this moment I would know the meaning of the word. The human in me feels the suffering of thousands and knows that I must do this.

In the end, it comes down to my faith. My faith that my mate and I are strong, that our love is strong, that our bodies are strong, that the child we have made is strong. My son is the grandson of a Goddess – he is not made of tender stuff. He will not be snuffed out by the bringing of peace. And so, with clear eyes and a steady heart, I plunge through the war zone towards the temple. know is at the center of the city.

We arrive what feels like hours later, our breath coming short, our mouths wide as we pant. The Goddess's temple is a shining white building that stands across the street from the palace.

It's so obviously a temple, I think, leaning on Cora and catching my breath as we look across the palace square at it. What on earth did I think it was, before I found out about werewolves and wolf society? I shake my head clear of the question, though it's not important now.

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"Oh my god," Cora gasps, grabbing my hand and pointing up at a huge screen on the left side of the square. It's on the side of one of our city's mega news organizations, a screen as wide as a billboard. And there, on it –

"Oh my god," I echo, my eyes going wide as I see the graphic image of the prince's corpse laying on a board room table. Beneath it, text scrolls:

Prince Damon declared dead...forces requested to cease fire...Sinclair declared leader of all werewolf kind....peace talks to begin...

"Why," Cora demands, looking around at the still-smoking city which still echoes with the sound of gunfire and bombs. "Why haven't they stopped, if the prince is dead?"

"Because," I pant, my breath just now starting to come back to me. "The human's war was never with the prince – it was with all of us." I shake my head at her. "It's humans versus werewolves now. This war has just begun." My voice is desperate, shaking.

"Unless we can stop it," Cora whispers, taking my hand. Her face takes on a new, determined look as she sets her jaw and then looks towards the temple. "Come on, Ella," she demands, tugging me forward into the chaos of the square. "Let's end this."