

Accidental Surrogate

Chapter 266 The Steps

Ella

We dash across the square, my hand clasped in Cora's, adrenaline moving my legs for me even despite the face that I don't have the strength for it. As we run, debris and smoke fly around us. The humans are pressing their advantage, shelling the center of the city with abandon after they heard the prince is dead. They know Sinclair must be regrouping, so they're doing as much destruction as they can while they can.

My eyes are on the temple steps ahead of me but for a moment – just a moment – my mind turns to my mate.

He is the one responsible for the prince's death I know it for a certainty, without having to ask. He wouldn't let anyone else take the final blow – it was vengeance and it was his. But the prince – that photo of him on the board room table – it had looked like it was in the palace My eyes flick to the palace building to my right – does that mean is Sinclair in there?

We're close to the temple steps now, just feet from them, really. But I have to try.

I tug at that bond within me, the one tied to that deep place somewhere behind my ribcage.

Dominic? I call, my inner voice breathless with the hope of it. My wolf gives a few excited nips, anxious inside of me, wanting to be with him, to smell him –

I wait, heart pounding, as Cora and I reach the steps, our feet thumping to match my heart's frantic rate. Cora takes the steps two at a time, pulling me up behind her until we reach the clear and empty marble expanse at the entrance of the temple. The temple, miraculously, has been untouched by the human's fire. Perhaps the Goddess has had a hand in shielding it for us, just until we got here.

"Are you ready?" Cora asks, panting. "Do you know what to do?"

I turn my attention to her, nodding, but can't help myself from glancing back at the palace.

"What?" she demands, following my gaze. "What is it?"

"Sinclair," I breathe, studying the façade, trying to see him – desperate for a glance "Ella!" My sister shouts, taking me by the shoulders and giving a little shake. "Pay attention! We've got work to do, and hardly any time to do it!"

"I think he's in there," I confess, turning my eyes suddenly full of tears – back to my sister. "Cora, this could kill me if I have a chance to say goodbye –"

Her face screws up with rage and she shakes me harder. "No, Ella," she yells, her voice desperate and angry at once. "No! You are the daughter of a damn Goddess, you will not die in the deliverance of her gift!"

I meet her eyes, then, and pause, shocked by her passion. But then I nod my head, fervently believing. I have to believe this, or else I won't have the strength to survive it. I place my hands on my stomach, reaching for the bond that I know still exists between me and my baby, but which has grown so weak in the past few days that I can barely sense it. I pour my strength down that bond, telling the baby how much I love him, how I can't wait to meet him, how we're going to live live live.

Cora, I think, senses what I'm doing and lets me have this moment alone with my child. But when I open my eyes, my gaze newly steeled and prepared for the challenge to come, she nods once and turns to face the square. I set my shoulders and stand next to her. I take her hand and close my eyes.

I work to slow my breathing, to get to that state I found in the desert under the moon when my mother gave me my instructions, told me how to deliver her gift. My heart rate falls to a peaceful resting rhythm, my vision starting to go violet behind my eyelids. I sink lower into myself, seeking the base of my being. My wolf curls up inside of me, finding peace as well.

But then, very suddenly, I feel that tug. The one behind my ribcage. The one tied to him.

Ella?

My eyes fly open as I gasp and I cry out. "Dominic!" I shout, my eyes frantically searching the square for him.

"What?" Cora pants, looking around, frantic. "What is it? Is he here?"

"He's here," I breathe, my eyes still searching and failing to find him.

"Ella," she says, looking at me with sorrowful eyes. "There's no time people are dying

"I know," I reply, closing my eyes again and setting my jaw. "You're right, I know. I'll – I'll press on."

It's a lie, though. I can't do this without a word to him Dominic! I shout in my mind, my wolf already on her feet, raising her nose to catch his scent. Where are you?

Here – he cries to me, and I can feel his anxiety, his love, his pleasure at hearing from me, his terror that I'm here in this horrible place, in the middle of the war. I'm in the palace – I'm working – where are you? I'll come find you now you've got to get inside –

NO, I reply, fervent. Please, Dominic, there's... there's something I have to do.

Goddess stuff? He asks, and I can hear the humor in his tone, even beyond the fear. I can't help the little smirk that plays at the corner of my lip.

Yeah, I respond, Goddess stuff.

Are you...are you safe? He asks. Are you okay?

I'm...I'm weak, baby. But I have to do this. I was born to do this.

Ella, his voice is a warning now, and the wolf in me responds instantly, eager to follow his lead, to listen to him, to trust him. Stop whatever you're doing – it's not worth it, if you're weak – Please, I say simply, letting him feel the strength in me, the assurance, the need. Trust me, Dominic. I can do this. I'll come back to you. I'm strong. We're strong.

There's a pause before he replies. I can feel his worry, his dread. But also, that he believes in me.

All right, trouble, he responds, and I can almost see him folding his arms over his chest and smirking at me. Do what you've got to do. But the minute you're done, I'm in charge.

Yes, Sir Big Alpha, I respond, letting him feel the sass in my message. I feel his laugh rumble down my bond to me, let it wrap around me, strengthening me further. One last thing, and then you're in charge.

He lets me go, then, and I take a deep breath, settling myself on the cold marble of my mother's steps. I hadn't realized that I'd needed that moment with him, that it was the last piece of the puzzle before I could do this right. But I should have known. He is such an intrinsic part of me, of my journey of who I am. How could I do this without him? Together, we are complete.

I settle my hands on my stomach, keeping the lines to my bond between my mate and my child open, returning to that base state. My wolf settles down again with me, brushing her warm fur up against those bonds, against my soul.

It's time.

As my breath and my heartbeat again slow, as my vision turns lavender, I open up my third bond that new one, between my mother and I.

And I let her power fill me.