

Accidental Surrogate

Chapter 272



Sinclair and I both gasp at the same moment, and my eyes fly open, finding his. We are both frozen in place, but then another cry sounds and we are instantly in motion, bolting through the forest, searching for our son.

“Rafe!” I cry, my voice desperate as Sinclair pulls ahead of me on his long legs. “Rafe, baby! We’re coming!”

Rafe’s cries are louder now, more solid, the sound of a real baby crying real tears. And then

suddenly something catches my vision out of the corner of my eye and I skid to a stop, turning left while Sinclair continues ahead.

And suddenly, I see –

A bassinet, of all things, sitting alone in the middle of the forest. And in it, I know, is my baby.” Dominic!” I call, wanting him back, wanting him at my side, but I don’t wait. Instead, I hurry to the side of the white basket, gripping the edge of it in my hands as I pull myself closer to it, desperately looking inside –

And then.

There he is.

My baby boy, my pup, my child–looking exactly as I knew he would be – not how I imagined he would look, but how I knew he would be.

I am breathless, wordless, as I reach for my child, who mews quietly with discontent in his little bed, swaddled in a clean white blanket. Slowly, softly, I left him into my arms, just staring at him as I hear heavy footsteps pounding behind me.

“Ella–“I hear Sinclair start, but then, as I turn, he forgets the rest of the word. He stutters to a stop, his mouth falling open as he takes in the sight of us – both of us – mother and child. But I barely spare him a glance, returning my gaze to my infant son.

“Hey, baby,” I murmur, my throat choked with my joy and my tears. “Hey, baby Rafe. We’ve been looking for you.” Slowly, I begin to rock and bounce him, soothing him, letting him feel me holding him against me, letting him know that I’m here, and I’m so sorry, and how I love him with the entirety of my being.

I hear Sinclair take a few steps closer and I tilt the still–crying baby towards him, letting my mate have a look at his son. I look up into Sinclair’s face as I hear him choke. I’m a little shocked – but honestly, not surprised – when I see tears streaking down his face.

“Hey, kid,” he starts, his voice wavering, his hand shaking a little as he reaches out his giant mitt to touch him. But before he can lay a finger on him, I see Sinclair hesitate, pulling his hand back.

“What,” I ask, laughing a little. “What’s wrong?”

“He’s just so tiny,” Sinclair marvels, shaking his head and staring down at our little boy’s perfect porcelain skin, his little mop of black hair. “If I touch him, I’ll crush him...”

My laughter shakes the baby a little, causing him to fuss and hiccough as I shake my head at Sinclair.

“He’s your son, Dominic. You won’t hurt him. You won’t let yourself.” So, still hesitant, Dominic reaches out just the tip of his finger and brushes it against Rafe’s perfect little cheek.

“Hey, Rafe,” he murmurs, and I can hear his heart in this throat. “We’re so excited for you. We’ve got big plans.”

I smile down at my baby for a moment, unable to tear my eyes from him, but then I look up at Sinclair and fall in love with him all over again, seeing the hope and the joy and the wholeness in his eyes as he takes in his first sight of his son.

“Here,” I offer, holding the baby out towards him. “Do you want to hold him?”

Sinclair looks at me with startled eyes and shakes his head. “Ella – he’s so small –”

I laugh a little at this but just pull the baby back to my breast, secretly pleased at the refusal. I never want to put this little baby down, I want to hold him just like this forever. Instead, Sinclair takes a step closer to me and wraps his arms around both of us, encircling us with his warmth and his protection and his love. And in this moment I just feel so....complete. So blessed to be able to share this with my mate and my son.

Rafe begins to quiet now, taking deeper breaths, blinking up at us sleepily with his grey little infant eyes that I know will someday turn green like his father’s.

“You’re going to grow up to be so big and strong,” I whisper to my pup, rocking him close against my body. “And we can’t wait to watch you do it.”

“We need you to be strong, buddy,” Sinclair whispers, his voice catching. “Just hold on. Your mama’s going to carry you, and keep you safe.”

“We’re so sorry,” I whisper, feeling tears come to my own eyes now at the thought of all the things my poor baby had to endure. No wonder he had been hiding, had shrunk away from me and the horrors of this world. “It will be different now – it will be safe, and good – you’re my only job now. We love you so much.”

“Hold on, baby,” Sinclair murmurs, reaching out a finger to stroke Rafe’s little hand, which has just popped out from its swaddling. “Just...hold on.” And as we watch, Rafe’s little hand uncurls and wraps around his father’s giant finger, coming nowhere close to encircling it but... trying nonetheless.

I feel the tears streak down my face as I look between them, the two men who are the world to me. But even as I watch, I feel the dream state start to shift. Start to fade, to pull away.

“I think we’re out of time,” I say to Sinclair, holding my baby tight against me, unwilling to let

He nods, realizing it too, realizing as well that there’s no reason to fight it. All dreams come to an end, even perfect ones like this. Hurriedly, he turns my face to his, pressing a kiss to my mouth. I savor it, the perfect contours of his lips which fit so perfectly to mine. He pulls away too soon.

“Come back to me,” he demands, his eyes serious, almost glaring into mine. “You come back to me, Ella. Wake up. As soon as you can.”

I nod, assuring him. “I will,” I promise. “I’m coming back to you. We both are.”

Sinclair opens his mouth to say something else, but before he can, the dream fades to nothing. And then there’s only mist.

Sinclair

I sit stark straight the moment I gasp back to consciousness, the memories of the dream ringing through my mind, and spin to Ella, looking desperately for that sweet smile, the flash of her eyes –

But...

I blink, uncomprehending for a moment as I realize that she hasn’t woken up alongside me. That she’s just laying still, breathing those same shallow breaths, her pulse a slow tick on the monitors beside her.

“Good, you’re up.”

I almost leap out of my skin as I hear the doctor’s voice. I spin towards him, my instincts instantly ready to attack – but I stop myself just in time.

“Sorry, sorry,” he says, putting up an apologetic hand. “I...I shouldn’t have startled you like that. I apologize.”

I take a moment to settle myself, to bring my pulse down to a semi–normal level, before turning to look at Ella again. “Is she alright?” I ask. “I met her in the dream – I was expecting her to...”

“Is that what you were doing?” The doctor asks, raising his eyebrow. “Interesting.” He looks towards the monitors. “She did display some increased brain activity for a bit there...which isn’t a bad thing...”

The hesitation on his face, though, tells me it isn’t precisely a good thing either.

“The baby?” I demand, my voice low with frustration and disappointment. Damn it, I had truly thought that would work...

“The same,” the doctor informs me, indicating a smaller monitor that’s tracking the fetal heart rate.

I put my head in my hands, wondering what the hell else I can do now...

I feel a hand on my shoulder and flinch, but I don’t bother to shove it off. The doctor is doing his best, after all working to save them, to bring them back to me.

“Her body is too weak,” the doctor says softly. “Even if you did contact her in the dream, even if she wants to come back, her body may not let her. Not yet. It’s...it’s in the hands of the goddess now.”

I despair for a moment but then...

I realize something. And raise my head. It is in the hands of the Goddess – and the Goddess has a gift to give. And I know who currently holds that gift...

“Call her,” I growl, glaring up at the doctor.

“Who?” he asks, removing his hand from my shoulder and flinching away.

“Cora,” I respond, “Ella’s sister. Get her here now.”