

Accidental Surrogate

Chapter 276: Ella Gets Hungry



Sinclair

I wake, a few hours later, jumping up straight the moment I realize that Elle n't next to me

She had drifted off to sleep hours ago after a simple dinner and a movie marathon. While she dozed next to me, I'd spent most of the late hours of the night answered the stack of emails piling up in my inbox and watching her sleep from the corner of my eye. But now, when my eyes peeked open for just a moment after maybe two hours of sleep?

Gone

I hurl the sheets off of me, getting to my feet in a flash, my head whipping around as I search the empty room for her with all of my senses. But my eyes tell me that she's not here, and my nose

Her scent is dull, but not stale She hasn't been gone long

A growl starts in my chest as I stalk from the room, looking through the empty hallways for my mate, desperate to find her. She was on bed rest, damn it – where the hell else would she be except bed?

Unless

Unless, something had happened – but she'd have woken me –

Or she'd been kidnapped – but there's no way I'd have slept through that.

I follow her scent quickly, my anger intensifying as I realize that it leads me down stairs. God damn it, the doctor expressly forbid her from stairs. I pound down the staircase hurrying through the hall and slamming open the kitchen door –

But then, she's suddenly there. Seated alone at the kitchen table in the dark, surrounded by a pile of food, her eyes wide.

"Um," she says innocently, knowing she's been caught and lowering the piece of cold fried chicken back down to its plate. "Do you want some?"

"Ella," I growl, storming to her side, relief washing through me like a wave. "What are you doing down here?" She looks up at me with her eyes still wide and then gestures at all the food as if it's

obvious.

My snarl deepens and I don't let her off the hook. "The doctor told you to stay in bed –

"I didn't go far!"

"He told you not to go down stairs."

She holds up a corrective finger at me. "He told me not to go up stairs. And I slid down on my butt to be extra careful! It was totally fine!"

I groan, throwing my head back and pressing my eyes shut. "Ella," I whisper between my clenched teeth. "You can't be taking these risks–"

"I was hungry!" she protests.

I snap my gaze back to her, glaring. "I could have gotten you food! Anything you wanted! I would have –"

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Her eyes go soft then, filled with apology. "You would have gotten up," she scolds, her voice worried.

"When you'd just fallen asleep, Dominic She shakes her gently at me. "You can't be at my beck and call like this- not for something simple like a trip to the kitchen for some food."

"And how," I ask, my anger fading but still not erased, "would you have gotten back upstairs? After your..."

"I stare around at the rather shocking amount of food gathered on the kitchen table, "feast?" "You have like six couches, Dominic," she replies, smiling innocently up at me like a little kid who knows they can get out of trouble if they're cute enough. Damn it, but it works. Just a little. "I'd have napped on one of those until morning, when you got up, and could lift me in your big strong arms and take me back upstairs."

"Oh, so you had it all planned out?" I murmur, relenting and raising a hand to play with the ends of her lovely rose-gold hair. I'm starting to calm now, realizing that my panic, while not precisely misplaced, hadn't come to the dark ends I was imagining.

"Yup!" she quips, giving me a big smile and reaching for an Oreo, popping it in her mouth.

I can't help laughing at this and pull a chair out for myself, sitting next to her. She hasn't won – not yet but...well, I can't really resist the sight of my pregnant mate happy, healthy, and hungry. But hungry for....

"What are you even eating," I blurt out, frowning at her selection. It's absolutely all over the place – fried chicken, pasta salad, cakes, wasabi-dipped peanuts, even a bowl of peas...

"Everything," she murmurs, grabbing and pulling open a pack of licorice. "That's also why I couldn't wake you to bring me food. I didn't know what I wanted. Turns out, I wanted it all." I grimace as she takes a bite of the licorice, ripping it off with her teeth as she turns a curious gaze to me. "Any chance we could move the nest down here? It'd be terribly convenient, with all of these cravings

I cut her off with a laugh, shaking my head. "No, Ella," I insist. "You can't move into the pantry like a mouse. We'll just make sure you have a better selection upstairs. Maybe we can hire someone..." I drift off into my thoughts, trying to think through solutions as she continues to pick through the contents of the table, grazing happily on whatever her body tells her is next.

My mind doesn't come up with much though. I'm too tired for real ideas. I sigh, running a hand down my face and rubbing my eyes with my thumb and my forefinger, thinking longingly of my pillow and our bed.

Ella gives a soft little "oh," putting her hand on my shoulder. I open my eyes and look at her worried face. "See?" she insists, shaking her head and studying my tired face. "I was right – you needed the sleep – you shouldn't be up, Dominic – you're not on the pregnancy clock like me. You should be asleep."

"Don't be ridiculous," I murmur, fighting a yawn. "I'm up whenever you need me –"

"And don't you see how that's a problem?" she pushes, shaking her head at me. "Dominic, your dedication to me means everything, you keep me so safe, but," she pauses, biting her lip, perhaps choosing her words carefully. "You have more then me on your plate now – more than you ever have You – you'll be crowned King soon. You have to be able to turn half your attention to that, and let me care for myself in the meantime."

"Ella," I begin, shaking my head.

"No," she interrupts, reaching out a hand to touch my cheek. "Let me finish, baby I see you -I see what you've been doing. You spend a whole day with me, making sure my every need is met, entertaining me, keeping me company. And when I fall asleep? You spend a whole day playing catch up with the rest of your life. I mean, half of your staff is on night hours now, aren't they? All for me." She shakes her head slowly, begging me to see her side "It's too much, Dominic "

"No." I growl stubbornly. I'm not angry, I'm just frustrated because I know she's right. "It's not too much – you mean everything, Ella –"

"I know," she assures me. "But Dominic. I'm on the mend. I'm getting better. And you've got to stop treating me like a porcelain doll – I'm strong." She flicks her hair back confidently then, affecting an arrogance I know she doesn't feel. "I am, after all, Goddess born," she jokes, her mouth pulling up at the corner.

I laugh with her but still shake my head. "Ella, if anything were to happen to you..."

"It's not going to," she states brightly, utterly confident. "Trust me, Sinclair. I'm good. Let me take care of me, and our baby, and let me tell you when I need help." Her smile broadens. "Like right now!" She raises her arms out to me. "When I need you to carry me back upstairs to bed. Because I'm finished with this."

She waves a dismissive hand at the mess all over the table. She grimaces briefly, pressing that hand lightly on her stomach. "I think Rafe is telling me that the licorice was

a step too far."

I chuckle, standing and gathering my mate into my arms. Before we go, though, while I've got her captive against me, I lower my face to hers for a quick kiss. "All right, trouble," I tease. "But you promise me, okay? That you'll ask for help when you need it. No pride, no putting me or the nation first."

"I promise," she says seriously, unable to help her little smile. "If it's between the national economy and me getting a bubble bath, I come first. I have no problem with that."

And so, smiling, I carry my love back up to bed.