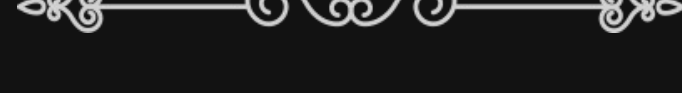


# Accidental Surrogate

Chapter 277 – Back to Work



Ella

When I open my eyes, Sinclair is already gone, despite the fact that he got maybe five hours of total sleep last night. He was gone as soon as his head hit the pillow when we got back to bed. I had taken a moment to nibble on a little madeleine cookie that I'd snuck into the pocket of my robe, but I hadn't been far behind him.

I stretch leisurely on the bed now, enjoying the ability to extend my legs and arms all the way across it with no gigantic wolf-man to block my path. Of course, I'd rather have him here than not, but we must accept life's small luxuries when we are granted them.

I take a minute to check in on the baby – still asleep, wrapped in contentment – and then glance around the room, wondering how I want to spend my day. I'm hit with a little pang of despair, though, as I realize that... this is going to be how every day starts for the next three months. And that my options are honestly limited to television, and reading, and whatever I can find on my phone. (4)

I sigh, scolding myself a little for hesitating at a luxury that I'm sure a thousand people would jump at. And it's not that I would prefer, at all, the sturm and drang of the past couple of months – trying to seize the country back from a mad prince, trying to end a war, worrying if Sinclair was dead, worried if I would die...

No, this was better but...damn it. I have to admit that the boredom is going to be a problem for me. I've always been one to spring out of bed, to leap for whatever the day has in store. Even when I was a little girl, I was always up before Cora –

I feel myself perk up at the thought of her. Yes, Cora! I grab my phone, hastily pushing the buttons and giving her a call.

"Cora?" I burst out as soon as she answers the phone.

"Ella!" she shouts, making me laugh. I hope she hasn't just scared the hell out of one of her patients, screaming in the middle of the office. She's been busy, I know, seeing a lot of pregnant women whose healthcare was interrupted by the war. "How are you – is everything okay?"

"I'm fine," I laugh, cheered by the sound of her voice. I lean back against the pillows, getting cozy. Do you want to come over? Hang out?"

"Um ya," she replies, as if it's obvious. "But I can't today, I have a double shift here. But tomorrow, maybe? You don't have plans to hang out with Sinclair then, do you?"

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"No," I sigh, and she laughs at my disappointment. "I'm sending him off to, you know, run his kingdom." She laughs again and I can't help the smile that spreads over my face. There's nothing quite like making your sister laugh.

"He must be with Roger, then," she wonders. "He's been calling Sinclair for days, begging him to pay attention to some stuff, complaining that the world's teetering on the brink of collapse without him." I can almost hear her roll her eyes. "As if that's anything new."

"I know," I murmur, biting my lip and feeling guilty. "That's all my fault – he's been paying way too much attention to me –"

"No, Ella," Cora interrupts, stern. "You come first –"

"Well so does the nation, Cora," I push back. But then, I perk up. "So you have to come over and babysit me, so he can go save the world or whatever. And tell me all about what's going on with you and Roger. Don't think I didn't notice that you two showed up at my hospital room

conveniently at the same time, one too many times."

Cora hesitates on the other line and I sit up straight.

"Wait," I add, worried. "What's going on?"

"Nothing," she hesitates. "I just...since you've been home, he's been so busy and I've been..."

"You've been what," I beg, a little breathless, worried now.

"Well, I've been...spending more time with Hank."

"Who the hell is Hank?!"

"He's your doctor, Ella," she states as if it's obvious. I grimace, realizing that I really never thought to ask and just called him "doctor" in my head. "You know, the one who took care of you for a week, brought you back from the brink of death? Who your mate hired to care for you, in conjunction with me, your OBGYN?"

"Oh," I say as I fall back against my pillows, my eyes going wide. "Wait, so you're not seeing Roger anymore?"

"I was never seeing Roger in the first place, Ella," she lies, sounding rushed and embarrassed. Then, I hear someone calling her from wherever she is. "I've got to go – I'll fill you in later. Bye, love you! Bye!"

I stare at the screen of my phone in my hand as it fades to black. Cora wasn't into Roger any more? And she was was dating my doctor?

And his name was Hank?

Sinclair

Roger places another pile of paperwork on my desk and I glare at it, resenting it because it represents another few hours away from Ella's side. It's not that I don't want to do this work – I lead this nation, stitch it back together after that sham of a war tore it apart. It's just...

"I know," Roger grunts, giving me a little glare. "You're distracted. But you have to do this, Dominic! It's bad timing to take over a nation when you're mate's halfway through a difficult pregnancy, but –"

"Enough," I bite out, sighing and slumping down in my chair. "Let's just get on with it." He nods and brings the papers forward, explaining their contents to me.

I'm grateful for him, really. In the time that Ella was hospitalized, Roger really stepped up and took control of leading this nation, securing my position when it had been vulnerable. He had negotiated the cease-fire with the human forces, organized the Alphas and assured them of the forthcoming peace, and, perhaps most importantly, had ended any ambitious grabs for the temporarily vacant throne.

Honestly, I couldn't have done it without him. My brother really stepped up for me, and I know

that within the next few weeks I'll have to find a way to show my gratitude properly. But right

now, all of this paperwork is killing me. Especially when my whole world is actually in the other room right now, eating Swedish fish between bites of wheat toast.

"You need to meet with them, Dominic," Roger insists, bringing my attention back to the matter at hand while crossing his arms over his chest. "With the mayor, and the rest of the heads of the human state. They want a face-to-face, and they're not out of line to demand it."

"Fine," I agree, nodding firmly. "Can they come here, to the house?"

Roger scoffs and sighs, giving me a frustrated look. "Dom, not everything can be done here – you have a palace, build for this kind of meeting –

"I'm not leaving her –"

"And the risks?" he pushes, drawing his eyebrows together. "You're letting people who consider themselves enemies to all werewolf kind into this house, cease fire or not. Do you want them to have that kind of access to Ella and your child?"

I growl at the very thought of it and Rafe nods, the issue decided. "I'll set it all up," he vows, "and I'll make sure you're briefed –"

"How are you doing all of this?" I interrupt, suddenly curious. "You've done the work of three men in the past few weeks – how are you doing it all? Who is helping you?"

Roger blinks at me, confused by the sudden change in conversation. "What? I have help – secretaries, our allies from the summit. Why does it matter?"

"Is it Cora?" I demand, anger starting to rise in me. "Because her only concern should be Ella – she's volunteering at that human clinic in her spare time, I know, but if you've got her doing this as well –"

"It's not Cora," he snaps, looking away from me and down at his papers.

I pause suddenly, surprised at the pain on his face. "Roger," I demand, drawing his eyes back to me. "Are you two..."

"Just leave it, Dominic," he snaps, using a tone he rarely takes with me. Then he deliberately looks back at the papers, though I can tell he's not really reading them. Just staring as he gets himself together.

I watch him for a moment but then I let it go. After all, his romantic life is his own business and he and Cora...well, they'd never made any promises, had they? Still. I admit that my curiosity is peaked

I make a mental note to ask Ella later what's going on between these two. If anyone can get to the bottom of this, she can.