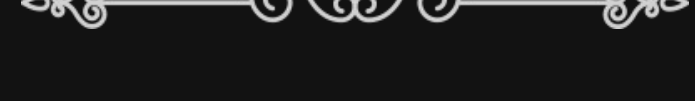


Accidental Surrogate

Chapter 290: Travel Disruption



Ella

The sound of gunfire rings out around us and I feel Sinclair lurch to cover me in the suddenly- still car. Trembling, I try to peek out from beneath his arm as he curses vehemently, his body tense over mine.

The gunfire ends and Sinclair moves, jolting back to the driver’s seat and hitting the gas, spinning the car and heading away from the bullhorn that’s suddenly blasting words in our direction.

“What’s happening?!” I shout, begging for information, doubled over in pain as my body continues its contractions, not caring about the fact that we’re suddenly, apparently, in a war zone.

“The insurgents,” Sinclair growls, glancing over his shoulder. “Picked f**king tonight to push forward with their rebellion – god damn it –”

I glance over my shoulder as well, suddenly seeing a road block in the middle of the street with figures standing behind it, wearing masks and holding guns.

“Humans?” I ask, desperate. “Who don’t want peace?”

Sinclair nods sharply, spinning the car around the city’s center square. I look around suddenly – hadn’t known where we were my eyes fixing on the temple, the palace, these familiar places I haven’t seen in weeks – since

Quickly, I dismiss the thoughts from my mind, not letting myself go there. “Can we go back? Can we get out of it?”

“No,” he growls, speeding across the square and skidding to a stop in front of the palace. “They’ll have us boxed in by now, and they saw my face. God damn it, I should have seen this coming. They’ll come after us now – we have to get you inside.”

With that, Sinclair jumps out of the car, coming quickly to my side and pulling my door open. I step out and he lifts me quickly into his arms, charging forward to the palace. There are guards waiting at the door who look at us with shock and surprise.

“Alpha,” the guard says. “We weren’t expecting

“Let us in,” Sinclair growls, barely stopping to let his command register and ready to burst through the door if the guard doesn’t open it in time, which, fortunately, he does. “Barricade this entrance all of the entrances – get as many guards here as you can, and let no one in except at my command. Is that clear?”

The guard nods quickly, all business, ready to follow through on Sinclair’s commands. As soon as we’re in the dark palace, though, I open my mouth, letting out the sharp cry I’ve been holding back. This contraction – it’s horrible, sharper than the others, and fast –

“Sinclair,” I pant, looking up at him. “The baby is coming – we have to get to a hospital”

He shakes his head at me, looking horribly repentant as he pounds up the wide marble stairs. I’m sorry, baby,” he says. “We can’t go anywhere until we know it’s safe.””

“Then what are we...” I look around, not recognizing what part of the palace we’re in now. But, apparently, Sinclair knows where he’s going, throwing his shoulder into doors and bursting through them until, quite suddenly, we’re in a beautiful bedroom with a wide four-posted bed with blue velvet curtains hanging down from a rich canopy.

Sinclair slows now and I look around the sumptuous room in awe as he carefully places me on the bed. “Well,” he says, grimacing a little, apology still in his eyes. “A King’s bedroom is as good as any a place for Rafe to be born, don’t you think?”

“Is that where we are?” I wonder aloud, still panting as pain for just a moment.

Sinclair nods to me and then sits on the bed by my side. “Ella,” he says urgently, taking my hand. “I need to go organize those guards, make sure that you are safe, make sure that they know to let Hank and Cora in when they get here –”

“Are they even going to be able to get here?” I gasp, looking up into my mate’s eyes, seeing the hesitation and doubt there. “Cora is across town – and I don’t know where Hank is – and we don’t have any medical supplies

“They’ll get here,” Sinclair growls, determination in every word. “But I have to go just for a few minutes – you text Cora, tell her where to come ” Sinclair pauses now, his eyes sweeping over me. “Ella, my love, will you be all right?”

I hesitate and then nod, suddenly, knowing that he has to do it. I want him by my side – don’t want him absent for a minute – but I know that without him to lay out his commands to the troops, this palace could be quickly overrun.

“Go,” I say, nodding encouragingly and working hard to put a little smile on my face. “We’ll be fine.” I move my hand to my belly again, worried, suddenly, as I realize that Rafe can feel my anxiety – an anxiety beyond that which a new mother feels when she goes into labor. My poor baby – he’s already endured so much...

Sinclair shakes his head and I know that he, too, feels my guilt. But he leans forward, placing a steady kiss on my forehead, and whispers “I’ll be right back. Right back, Ella.” I nod, and then he’s striding away from me, leaving me alone here in this sumptuous room.

I’m very suddenly overcome by the strangeness and the silence of it all. My contraction has ended, so I’m not currently in pain, but I feel my breathing ratchet up anyway as I look around this gigantic dark room, at the lurking shadowy corners. Was this...was this where Damon slept? Where he lived his life? Where he came with his wife, with...with Lydia?

Suddenly, I start to shake with the panic of it all, and thick fat tears squeeze themselves from my eyes. God damn it – just a few hours ago I was so happy – so comfortable, so at peace with everything –

How fast the world turns.

My hands shaking, I pull my phone from the emergency bag and begin to text my sister, letting her know that the plans have changed. Almost as soon as I send the text, though, my phone starts to ring. I pick it up, my voice shaking.

“Hello?”

“What the hell is going on, Ella?” Cora’s voice furiously demands, “You need to get to the hospital.Now.”

“We can’t,” I explain, my voice shuddering. “We don’t know who

“God damn it, Ella, I’m going to kill him,” she snarls.

“Who?” I gasp, desperate and uncomprehending.

“That mate of yours, for getting you into this.”

“It’s not his fault,” I growl, willing to defend Sinclair to the end of this.

“Whatever,” Cora snaps. “Listen, just...hold tight until this all gets sorted out, okay? I’m sure that Sinclair will have troops there in a few minutes – a whole wave of them – and they’ll be able to clear those insurgents and get you to the hospital. Fast.”

“Okay,” I say, nodding, a little relief coming to me at the idea. But then, I start to feel the pain rising again in me. “Um, Cora?” I ask, looking down at my stomach as the ache begins to intensify and spread.

“Yeah?” she asks, impatient. I can hear her moving around, objects clattering in the background in her hurry.

“Can you come here anyway? Like, now?”

“I’ll just meet you at the hospital

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“No, Cora,” I insist. “I need you now.”

There’s a pause on the other end of the phone, complete silence. Then, my sister speaks. “What’s going on, Ella?”

“My contractions,” I explain. “They’re only they’re four minutes apart.”

My sister curses, shocking me a little with the intensity and fluency of her expletives. I blink in shock.

“Just stay put, Ella,” she commands. “I’ll be there as soon as I can.”

“But how will you

”

“I’ll be there –” she shouts, and then the phone goes blank.

I drop the phone to the bed, my lip starting to tremble with anxiety and fear and loneliness. But then I glance down at myself, fighting against the spasms of shocking pain that are spreading through my center. Because I’m not alone, am I?

Rafe is here. And I need to start concentrating on him.

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So, I take control – or at least, as much of it as I can. I stand up, ignoring everything in my situation except my baby and my body’s own needs. I peel back the covers of the bed, revealing the clean sheets beneath, and I climb in, stacking pillows behind me to support me as I sit against

them and start to breathe through the contraction. I close my eyes and concentrate on the bond between me and my child.

Just me and you, kid, I tell him, wiping my fear away as best I can and sending him a burst of love. I’ve got you. We can do this.

And my heart fills with courage as he sends me a little pulse back: belief.

Rafe trusts me. And it’s all I need.

It’s time to bring my baby into the world, and I’m ready. I was born for this.