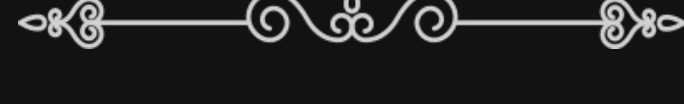


Accidental Surrogate

Chapter 291: Contractions



Ella

Slowly, I breathe through my contractions, taking deep breaths in through my nose and huffing them out of my mouth. The pain is...well, I suppose I can't say like anything I've felt before, can I? Not after all I've been through in the past five months. But it's incredible, the way it radiates through my body, making me grit my teeth against it.

I can feel my body moving, changing along with the contractions. The pain in my pelvis, particularly, is insane, as the bones shift to make room for the baby to pass through. My eyes flash open during one particularly difficult contraction and I hear myself cry out against the pain. God, I would have thought that being a wolf made this easier – wolves seem to have a whole litter of pups without much trouble, by themselves out in the woods.

Passingly, I consider shifting into my wolf form to ease this

But then, suddenly, Sinclair bursts into my room, dashing for me.

"What," he gasps, almost skidding to the side, looking me all over for what is wrong. "What is it, Ella – I heard you scream –"

"No," I say, gasping a little as the contraction starts to come to its end. "No, it's just the contraction – god, Dominic, these suck –"

He shakes his head, still panicked, trying to put it all together as he kneels by the side of the bed and takes my hand. "Cora is coming, she's close," he murmurs. "She'll be allowed in."

"And Hank?" I ask, looking at my mate. "And Roger?"

"Roger?" Sinclair asks, confused.

"Yes, Dominic! Roger! I want him here as well!"

"Why?" Sinclair's eyes are wide with wonder now.

"Because!" I smack his shoulder, frowning at him. "He's the child's uncle! And his godfather! He should be here! I can't believe you didn't call him!"

"Ella," Sinclair sighs, reaching for the cell phone in his back pocket as I lean back on into the pillows, taking deep breaths. "I can't believe you're thinking about propriety while you're giving birth with insurgents outside

"This is going to be as perfect as I can make it for Rafe!" I snap, determined. "And if I have to give birth in a war zone with no epidural, then Roger can damn well get out of bed and come over here to greet his nephew!"

"Ookay..." Sinclair says softly, giving in without any further questions. I hear him tapping on his phone and then he shifts. I watch him stand, leaning over me. Frowning, he leans over and grabs one of the pillows from the other side of the bed, quickly taking the pillowcase between his two hands and ripping off a long strip,

"You know you don't need to do the linens thing and boil water that's just in the movies. I'm sure Cora will bring something else to sterilize any instruments she brings–"

"It's not for that," he murmurs, leaning down and wiping the sweat from my brow with the little square of pillowcase folded in his hand. "How are you, love? How do you feel?"

I relax back as much as I can against the pillows, the next contraction not starting yet. "I feel...determined," I say, gazing up at him. "Rafe is ready. He told me so. We're both ready."

"That's my girl," Sinclair says softly, taking my chin between the fingers of his big hand and gazing at me. "So strong."

I nod at him, willing myself to believe it too – that I'm strong even though I'm scared and in pain. I am strong. For him, and for Rafe, and yes – for myself – I can be strong.

"Ooooh," I say, pressing my eyes shut again, my hands

Sinclair gets on his knees by my side again, steady and tense. Then, as I start to breathe in that special way Cora made me practice, he breathes along with me. He's there with me, every step.

Time passes quickly this way, with long stretches of pain followed up by a few minutes of respite. Unfortunately, those minutes are coming closer and closer together. I'm moving through this birth process fast, and I don't have any control over it. If I could wait, just hold him in while we wait for Cora to get here...

But no, it seems like Rafe and my body have other plans.

Sinclair talks softly to me throughout the process, helping me get ready in the moments between contractions. He helps me change into a cotton nightgown instead of the travel clothes I was wearing on the way here. He brings me two cool cups of water, one for drinking, the other for dipping more strips of pillowcase in to lay across my hot forehead. Throughout it all, my mate is all attention and support.

But beneath that, I can see on his face the worry and guilt that he's done something horrible in not getting me to the hospital. I hold his gaze steadily whenever I can, letting him know, silently, that we're all going to be all right. We're going to make it.

I don't know how much time has passed when the door bursts open. Cora flies into the room, panting, a medical bag slung over her shoulder. I almost spill the glass of tap water Sinclair just handed me all over myself as I give a little shriek of surprise when she bursts in.

"Ella," she gasps, dashing over to me, almost bowling Sinclair over in her singular focus to be at my side, to look me over and assess my condition.

"Steady," Sinclair murmurs, a little frustrated, as he puts out a hand to balance himself so that he doesn't go sprawling on the floor. Cora ignores him.

enture

"Ella, love," she murmurs, her eyes sweeping over me. "Tell me what's going on

I need to know." She puts a hand on my stomach, feeling for the baby. "He's low..." she murmurs as I fill her in on the timing of my contractions – three minutes apart now – and the aches and pains.

survey of my

"Everything sounds normal, Ella," she says calmly, looking at me in the eye so that I can see her faith. I hear Sinclair give a great sigh of relief, but I keep my eyes on my sister. She breaks my gaze, though, and starts peeling back the sheets. "I need to take a look. Can you lay back all the way?"

I do as she says, clearing the pillows so that I can lay flat on the bed and allowing my sister to examine me. As she does, I look up at Sinclair, who takes my hand.

"Well," Cora says quietly after a few minutes. "I don't have all of the tools I would like to make a full assessment, but," she sits up and looks me in the eyes, giving me a big grin. "Ella, you've moved through this remarkably fast. From what I see, you're ten inches dilated and ready to start pushing."

Her grin broadens. "Are you ready to have this baby, sis?" Cora asks, reaching forward to take my other hand.

"Really?" I gasp, my eyes going wide. I look between my sister and my mate. "No way – it's too soon

"It's time," she says, "believe it or not, but it's time."

"But," I struggle to sit up and Sinclair offers a helping hand. "Hank isn't here yet – neither is Roger

"Roger," Cora snaps, frowning at me a little. "Why is he coming?"

"What is with you two," I ask, baffled, looking between my mate and my sister. "Why is everyone so shocked that I want the baby's uncle to be here when he's born?"

"We just didn't think of it, love," Sinclair responds, brushing the damp hair away from my forehead. "Our concentration is on you."

I open my mouth to respond but a sudden surge of pain hits me and I groan, turning my attention back to my belly, my core, where I can feel my child pressed low against me. Oooohhh," I say, hunching my shoulders forward. "Oh, it's a big one."

"They're all going to be big now," Cora says, perhaps a little too cheerfully. "Come on, Ella. It's time to push."