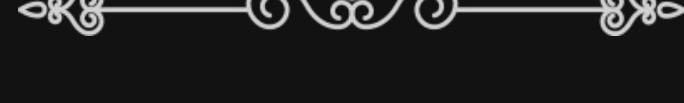


Accidental Surrogate

Chapter 294



Ella

“And I am leaving immediately,” Roger adds in, making us all laugh. “Seriously,” he says, “I’m useless until the kid is old enough to throw a ball. Then, it’s all Uncle Roger.” (2)

I smile at him, pleased, and take his hand to squeeze it, letting him know how glad I am that he came. His eyes soften as he looks at me, and I know he feels the same.

“All right,” I say, sighing and climbing into the bed. “Sounds like a plan to me.”

Then, everyone goes to their work, Roger and Hank leaving the room and Cora sitting next to me to help me through the first steps of breastfeeding. Sinclair sits close by, clearly interested, but not interfering as Cora shows me how to help the baby latch. I feel a whole new rush of emotion as I feel him begin to suck, as I feel the milk start to flow and feed my baby.

“There,” Cora says softly, and I look at her with tears in my eyes. “See? You’re a natural.”

“Where should he sleep?” I ask, looking around, suddenly desperate. We don’t have a basinet, of course.

Cora just shrugs. “You’ll figure it out. Use your mom instincts. People were having babies for thousands of years before hospitals came to answer these questions for them about how to have their first night.” She grins a little wickedly at Sinclair and me. “I don’t think you two are going to get much sleep anyway, but... you’ll figure it out.”

I laugh a little and return my gaze to my baby, whose eyes are closed as I hold him warm against my chest. “That’s right, baby,” I whisper. “We’re going to figure it out.”

“Okay,” my sister says, standing and giving me a kiss on the forehead. “You’re a marvel, Ella,” she whispers. “Call me if you need anything. I’ll see you at the hospital tomorrow.”

I nod, but don’t look at her, instead staring at my son. My new baby, this much- and long–desired child who is finally, finally here.

I feel the weight of Sinclair’s body on the bed next to me as the door clicks shut behind Cora, but I don’t take my eyes away from Rafe as Sinclair wraps his arms around me.

“Well,” Sinclair sighs, pressing a kiss to my hair. “This is the start of a whole new era. Are you ready for it?”

“Oh,” I say, turning my head to grin up at my mate, eager. “I’m ready for it. I’ve been waiting for this my whole life.”

I’m exhausted as I push through the doors of the palace but I also feel oddly...complete. It’s more than the general happiness I feel after one of my patients safely delivers a healthy child. Of course, that’s normal, I think, considering that it’s my sister.

But still, there’s something...else in the air. More than just a job well done. I reflect, suddenly, that maybe it’s the knowledge that I have a new little nephew now, to raise and to help discover the world. There’s something wonderful in that.

I make eye contact with one of the guards standing at the bottom of the steps, wanting to make sure that it’s safe to leave, and begin to take a step when he waves me forward. However, I jump when I hear the voice behind me.

“So,” it says. And I know without turning who it belongs to. I turn, meeting Roger’s eyes. “I hear we’re going to be godparents together.”

“Oh?” I ask, watching him as he walks slowly over to me, his hands sunk deep in his pockets.” Well, that’s not much of a surprise. The two lone siblings of the father and the mother.”

“Yes,” he says, coming to stand close to me. Close enough that I can almost feel his words as breath on my cheek, as well as hear them. “But only one of us is the daughter of a deity. I think Rafe is making out better on his mother’s side.”

I can’t help the little laugh that spills out of me at that, and I look down at my feet. “Well,” I say, a little awkward. I haven’t talked to Roger in weeks, let alone this casually. “I suppose that’s up for debate, considering I’m a human amongst the wolves.”

“Cora,” Roger says, hesitating, and I see his hand reaching for mine. I flinch away.

“What?” I ask, suddenly mad. “What are you even doing here? Weren’t you so eager to get home?”

Roger hesitates and then pulls his hand back, perhaps wanting to pretend like he never reached but for mine. He gives a casual little shrug, looking out at the newly–quiet city. “The troops quelled the riots, but that doesn’t mean that everyone went home and no one’s lurking in the dark wanting to make mischief.” He looks at me then, pausing before he continues. “I wanted to make sure you got home safe.”

“Well, I’m fine,” I snap, turning away from him and heading down the steps to where my car is parked. “Thanks for the thought, but I’m fine.”

“Cora,” he calls after me, his voice full of regret.

“What!” I snap again, turning to glare at him. “What, Roger! I don’t need you to protect me! I don’t need this!”

“You don’t need what?” he asks, challenging me. “You don’t need help getting home? Or you don’t need me?”

“God damn it, Roger,” I growl, almost through my teeth, shaking my head at him. “Seriously? Now? You want to dig into this now, after months of silence on the subject?”

“What subject, Cora?” he asks, his voice angry now. “The absolute nothing that is us?”

I open my mouth to throw his words back at him, but he’s too quick for me.

“And even if I wanted to,” Roger pushes, “how could I? You’re always with him.”

“Oh?” I ask, sarcastic, my eyes going wide. “Is that the great barrier? Have you never heard of this thing called a phone?”

“You wanted to have this conversation over a phone, Cora?” Roger asks, closing the distance between us, his voice hurt now as well as mad. “That’s all you think it deserves?”

“What conversation?” I hiss. “Like you said. It’s the nothing that is us. There’s nothing to say.” I grit my teeth and turn then, heading back down the stairs, fast and mad, wanting to get away

from him. Certainly not wanting him to see the new dampness on my lower lashes.

“You killed this, Cora,” Roger shouts after me, apparently not caring who hears. “You did this. Not me.”

Anger flares in me now, so intensely that I halt in my steps. Then, acting on rage more than logic, I spin and throw myself back up the stairs towards him, stopping when I’m so close to him that a single breath would heave my chest against his.

Then, I raise a single hand, place my splayed fingers against his chest, and push.

He stumbles back, I think more out of surprise than any real strength in me. He’s a wolf, anyway. And I’m just a human.

“F*ck you, Roger,” I whisper, knowing that he can hear me. “You did this. I was in. And you stopped calling me.” (2)

“I was busy –” he protests, “trying to fix the nation

I laugh, shaking my head and turning away from him. “Whatever excuse you want to make,” I call over my shoulder, still angry but doing a better job now, I think, of hiding it and playing it cool.” But don’t blame me just because I didn’t wait around for you after you ghosted me.”

“Cora!” Roger calls, and, well, even if there is pain in his voice I don’t care anymore. Or at least, I walk away like I don’t.

I give him a finger over my shoulder and call, more casually than I feel, “I’ll see you at the christening.”

I roll my eyes when I hear his retort.

“Werewolves don’t have christenings!”

“Whatever!” I respond, pulling open the driver’s door to my car and sitting down heavily in my seat. I don’t look in my rearview mirror as I drive away.

I don’t want to know if he watches me leave. Don’t want to see the expression on his face.

Because if I see that he’s as devastated by this conversation as I am, then...

And I am determined. Determined not to go back.