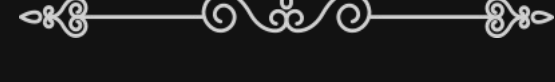


## Accidental Surrogate for Alpha

Chapter 324



#Chapter 324 – Sister Stuff

Ella

"I wonder what Cora's up to," I sigh as I stand by the window rocking Rafe, who his crying a little and fussing in my arms. I know that he doesn't need anything – he's been fed, burped, changed, and everything else a baby could want. He's just crying to cry, and I give a defeated little sigh, smiling at him and knowing that he just has to take a minute to work

it out.

Sinclair, sitting on the bed with papers spread out all around him, glances up at me. You haven't had any word from her?" he asks.

"No," I reply, shaking my head. The last thing I heard was from the guards, who said they got separated from Cora and Roger by a flash flood. I'm...worried about her."

"You know Roger will take care of her," Sinclair says passively, flicking through the papers, looking for one in particular.

"I know," I sigh, bobbing Rafe in my arms. "But even Roger can't protect against the forces of nature. It's just so strange – they're only three hours away, and they're apparently caught in some kind of hurricane? And we've got sunny skies?" I turn again towards the window, frowning. Something that feels uncannily like my mother's gift pulses inside me, making my wolf turn towards it in attention, cocking her head to the side curiously. But neither of us know what to make of it, so I sigh again.

Rafe lets out a little wail then, working one of his little arms free of his blanket and waving an angry fist in the air.

"Oh baby," I murmur, leaning down to give him a little kiss. "What do you have to worry about? You're not stuck out in a storm. You're here safe, with mommy!"

"Maybe he's picking up on mommy's anxiety," Sinclair says, standing up from the bed and coming next to us, reaching for the baby. "Maybe he feels it down the bond

"Don't blame me for your child's bad attitude," I say, joking and handing Rafe over into his father's arms, whose size remind me again of the tiny delicacy of my baby boy "He gets that from your side. I'm no crybaby"

Sinclair laughs, rocking the baby in his arms, and Rafe quiets almost instantly, his yowl softening to an angry little murmur "Why," Sinclair asks, "do you always suggest that his

undesirable qualities come from me? I come from excellent stock"

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"Because," I say, standing on tip toe to look down at my baby's perfect little face, raising a hand to tieke his belly a little I'm jealous, a bit, that he quiets so readily in his father's aums, but not jealous enough to take him back if it means he'll cry. Alongside the jealousy, there's also a part of me that loves Rafe's connection with his father, that he like me – finds comfort in the Alpha's arms "My genetic line is that of a perfect Goddess You can't beat that "

"You have a father too, you know," Sinclair reminds me.

"Yes," I say, grinning up at him. "A king. I win. Again."

Sinclair laughs, opening his mouth to retort, when we hear a little knock at the door. We

both turn to it, Rafe settling down more completely now, and Sinclair's mouth drops at

little to see his father there, wheeling forward.

"Am I interrupting?" Henry asks curiously.

"Dad," Sinclair says, smiling and moving forward. "No- but how-how did you get up

here?"

"Ella's excellent lift system," Henry says, as if it's obvious. He looks to me then. This chair is really state of the art," he says, gesturing to the chair I ordered for my bed rest. Tll really have to consider one of these for myself."

"Ella," Sinclair says, frowning at me. "I thought I told you to arrange to get rid of the chairs. And the lift."

"But Henry needs them!" I say, grinning widely to hide the fact that I completely ignored that command.

Sinclair groans, tilting his head back, realizing he's never going to get his house back to the way it was. I pat him on the arm, knowing that it's the right choice Henry should have free run of the house, and if I'm ever pregnant again.

"It's very practical," Henry says, raising his eyebrows at his son "But I came up with information," he says, pulling a folder from the little pocket by his side, "on the cult that Roger and Cora discovered"

"Oh," I say, moving behind his chair to look over his shoulder, eager to know more. Sinclair likewise steps forward, a protective hand on Rafe as he leans forward "What did you find?"

"Well, unfortunately, that the cult is alive and well It actually makes sense that the book that Cora and Roger found was so old, because the Monastic Cult of the God of Darkness

secrecy. As the book reports, they never write anything down and pass all of their traditions from brother to brother. This has allowed them to operate in the background for decades, largely unnoticed. It's actually rather a miracle that that book reported anything about them – our best guess is that, in fact, the scholar who wrote it must have been an ex- member of the brotherhood themselves."

"Wow," I say, looking between Henry and my mate. "But they're still...operating? In

secrecy?"

"In full force, apparently," Henry says, looking up at me and tapping the report. Then he

looks at his son. "Your investigative team did quite well once they had this lead. The Cult has, by necessity, had to start leaving a bit of a trail on the dark web and other such underground spaces, in order to communicate across distances and acquire rare materials for their ceremonies. But from what your investigators estimate, they're more powerful

than they've ever been."

"And these men," Sinclair considers, standing and rocking the baby absentmindedly. They're responsible for switching the sperm that brought Ella and I together. They, for some reason, wanted Rafe to be born."

"Indeed," Henry says, raising his eyebrows. "But it is particularly curious that they showed their hand a bit in sending a robed member to do their work. The high-ranking members of the Cult who wear the robe are, apparently, notoriously reclusive. It is perhaps to our luck that the man who tricked Cora – and," he shifts his gaze to me, "who has been, apparently, following the two of you your whole lives, is a high-ranking member of the cult. If it had been a plain-clothes member, we may never have been able to discover who was behind this."

"Why is that, though?" I consider, coming to stand at Sinclair's side and folding my arms over my chest. "Why didn't they send someone in normal clothes?"

"I don't know," Henry says, with a shrug. "Perhaps they needed someone with a particular affinity for magic, or someone with great strength. We know, for instance, that the Goddess's priests were keeping an eye on you. It is likely that they needed someone very strong to evade their detection."

I nod, considering that that makes sense, and look up at my mate. His eyes, however, are fixed steadily on his father.

"What is it, dad," Sinclair says, his tone suddenly sharp. "What is it you're not telling us?"

Surprised, I look back at Henry, curious. There's nothing on his face that speaks any secrecy to me, and I look back up at Sinclair, confused.

Henry sighs, though. "I should have known that you'd see through me, Dominic," he murmurs. "You always could read me like a book."

"Out with it, dad," Sinclair says, his whole body tense now. I glance at Rafe, registering that he's fully asleep, and can't help myself from noting that he's certainly not letting his father's clear anxiety affect his own moods, as he does mine. I purse my lips at my baby and then turn my attention to my father-in-law.

"Your intel has spoken to an escaped member of the cult," Henry says. "The man insists on being anonymous, but he was willing to divulge some of their practices."

"Well that's wonderful," I say, hope blooming in me. "That's so helpful -"

"It is," Henry says, looking up at me, his eyes still worried. "We're grateful for that, of course, but..."

"Dad," Sinclair growls at Henry's hesitation, annoyed now at the further delay.

"All right, Dominic," Henry says, putting his hands up and sighing. "It's just – he told us that their standard method of operation is to play the long game – to place a member of the cult within the target's inner circle. To spend months, if not years, becoming a confidant of the target, becoming a best friend or a member of the family. And then, when the Cult decides that the time is right, that person strikes. The victims are...almost always completely blindsided by the betrayal."

"Oh my god," I gasp, looking between Henry and Sinclair. "This means...it could be

someone we know and love? Someone close to us?"

"Yes," Henry concludes, nodding slowly. "It is very likely that the Cult has been working for years to bring about the birth of this child. And we still don't know why they wanted Rafe to be born, and for you to be his particular mother and father, but we do know..."

"That if they're working that hard," Sinclair says, picking up his father's line of thought. That they've certainly placed someone within our inner circle, who is seeking to betray us."

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"Oh my god," I say, my hands flying to my mouth in shock. And then I wrack my mind,

wondering who on earth it could be. But no one comes to mind everyone I know and love none of them could be involved in such a nefarious scheme to steal my baby away

Right?