

ACCIDENTAL SURROGATE FOR ALPHA

Accidental Surrogate Chapter 346-Ella

I blink, surprised, when I hear a laugh tumble from Roger's mouth. Honestly, I had expected anything else. Yelling? Yes. Begging? Sure. Stern orders? Absolutely.

Anything, really, except the low chuckle that falls from Roger's lips as he leans back and puts his hands in his pockets. "I'm serious," Cora says, crossing her arms and glaring at him. "I'm going with you. You need me."

"Cora," Roger says, shaking his head. "I need you, absolutely. But if you think for a second that I'm letting my pregnant mate climb into a sewer with me as part of an attack on an unknown enemy.

"Well if you wouldn't let me do it, why on earth would I let you do it!" she counters, angry.

"Because I'm not pregnant!" Roger shouts back, angry, as if it's obvious. Sinclair shifts a little, moving behind me – his arms still around my shoulders – so we can both watch.

"We're pregnant," Cora shouts, pointing between herself and him. "This is not a me or a you kind of thing! I am not interested in single motherhood on what is essentially day two of this pregnancy!"

"Cora," Roger sighs, putting an exhausted hand on his forehead. "This is my job. This is what we do. You can't ask me to back away from it."

"Why not, when you're doing the same to me?" Cora counters, shaking her head at him, being stubborn. I bite my lip, torn between wanting to support my sister and frankly agreeing with Roger. There's absolutely no way in hell that Cora should be going on this mission.

"What are you talking about?" Roger asks, frustrated. "I can help," she says, pointing at herself, "I'm a doctor. You guys are going to get all torn up out there – you need me!"

Have we had enough of this? Sinclair asks, speaking to me mind-to-mind as I lean back against him, tense as we watch our siblings argue. When do I interrupt?

Give them another second, I reply internally, wanting them to figure this out on their own if they can. But even if it did come to something as simple as a vote? It's three to one. Cora's staying home. "We're trained in field medicine."

Roger says, waving a dismissive hand. "It will be enough to hold us through it until we can get home –"

"People could die!" Cora counters, you could die! And how the hell would I feel, for the rest of my life – what would I tell our child – when I remembered that I could have been there and saved you?"

Roger's face falls at this thought and I see him falter, no knowing how to reply. And frankly I'm torn by the idea as well if Sinclair died, and I could have done something...

I don't know if I'd survive it myself. Now? Sinclair asks me, his own inner voice dark and sad. Let me, I reply, and I step forward, putting a hand on Cora's arm.

"Cora," I whisper and, after a second, my sister drags her eyes away from her mate to look at me. Slowly, I shake my head, "Cora, you can't go."

"Why not?" she growls, stern. "Because," I reply, with a little shrug. "Your argument goes both ways. How the hell would Roger feel if you got killed and your baby with you – and he could have kept you safe?" a

Roger audibly groans at the idea and has to turn away from us, tortured by it, raising a hand to cover his face for a moment as he collects himself. Cora turns to look at him, surprised, I think, by the rare display of intense emotion. These Sinclair brothers – they're so steady on the surface, but we always have to remember that still waters run deep.

Cora moves towards him, placing her hands on Roger's shoulders, turning him back towards her and wrapping her arms around his waist. She lays her head on his chest when he puts his own arms around her. "I don't like this," she whispers against his shirt, "I hate it, Roger."

"I know," he murmurs, his lips against his hair. "I'm sorry. But Cora, I promise you it will be all right."

"Is it always going to be like this?" she asks, looking up at him. "Is this what I've gotten myself into? Battle after battle, fight after fight? Constantly worried about whether or not you're coming home to me, to...us?"

I feel my own stir of intense emotions at her question, looking up at Sinclair and meeting his eyes as he shakes his head steadily at me. No, he says, firm in my mind. We will have peace. I will bring you peace. Just...a little further.

"I promise, Cora," Roger replies, tightening his arms around her. "I promise it will be all right."

Sinclair turns me, then, and I nod, letting him shepherd me out of the room and giving the two of them a moment alone. My mate takes my hand as we pass through the door and head down the hall, both of us silent, me looking down at my baby and feeling, I'm sure, almost precisely the same feelings that Cora is at the moment.

"Is it different now?" Sinclair asks me as we head into our little room.

"Hmm?" I ask, brought out of my thoughts at his words. "Now that he's born," Sinclair says, nodding to the baby as I carry him over to his little makeshift crib. "This isn't the first time you've sent me off to battle. Does it feel different, now that he's a little person instead of part of you?"

"He was always a little person," I murmur with a little smile as I lay Rafe down, "since very early on, he was my little guy. But no," I reply, straightening and looking up at my mate, who stands close to me. "It's always horrible, Dominic. I'm never going to get used to it. That time we thought you died..."

Tears spring to my eyes at the memory. He shushes me a little, pressing a finger to my mouth, and I nod, understanding. It's not that he doesn't want me to engage with these feelings these memories – he just....

Well, we both know that I don't need to go there. Not really. He will come back to me today, as he did before. As he always does.

Slowly, seeing me pull myself together, Sinclair gives me a deep nod. "Brave little mate," he whispers, leaning down to press a kiss to my mouth. I wrap my arms around his neck, clinging close, never wanting to let him go.

The day passes quickly, with all of the preparation, and Cora and I watch mostly in silence. We do what we can to help, but Sinclair has built a very capable team. Frankly, they don't need much, which is worse for us. We're both helpers – it's our instinct to pitch in.

"I hate this," Cora growls next to me as we watch the men pack all of their supplies into the cars they'll be taking.

"It's for the best," I sigh, leaning my shoulder against hers as I bounce Rafe in my arms, trying to get him to stop crying. It's almost as if he knows his dad is going away. "No battlefields for baby," I say passively, smiling down at my boy.

Cora laughs darkly and I look over to see her rolling her eyes. "Honestly, Ella," she says, shaking her head. "You were in like, three battlefield situations when you were pregnant."

"True," I say, quirking my head to the side. "Sinclair probably should have locked me up in a bunker long ago."

"Truer words never spoken," Sinclair says as he walks over to us, smirking. "Is it time?" I ask, stepping close as Roger likewise comes near.

"It is," Sinclair replies, pulling me close and looking first into my face and then down at the baby. "Calm down, baby trouble," he murmurs, reaching out a hand to trace a large finger across Rafe's forehead. "I'll be home soon."

"You'd better be," I growl, glaring at my mate and tilting my head up for a kiss, which he gives me.

"Don't eat all the snacks," he whispers, giving me a wink and a smack on the ass as he begins to turn away. "We'll be hungry when we come home."

"No promises!" I call after him, grinning as I watch him walk away. I turn, then, and watch Cora let Roger go as well, my heart breaking for her a little bit.

"See you soon, gorgeous," Roger says with a wave as he moves towards the car. And I step closer to my sister, taking a deep breath, sending a quick prayer to the Goddess that this isn't the last time we see them alive.

Accidental Surrogate Chapter 347-Sinclair

Things move quickly once we arrive at the point of entry. Everything has been planned to the letter so that even our arrival is quiet, covert, in the darkest hours of the night when we're least likely to be seen. Each of the cars filled with our men has parked at different points in the surrounding blocks of the city so that when we do converge on the sewer, we do it in near silence and darkness.

Roger and I are there first and, in preparation, we contact our father at home to let him know that we're in position. Once we're in the sewers, our ability to speak with him will be limited 1 it will just be us down there, along with whatever we find.

Dad replied readily, letting us know that all is well – if not a little tense – at the bunker. I smiled a little at the message, thinking of Ella and Rafe safe and worried. Of Cora pacing anxiously, waiting for Roger. It's not that I like thinking of them being upset but, well. It's nice to be missed. Nice to be able to think of someone at home loving you, wanting you to come back.

“Ready?” Roger asks, giving me a nudge and pointing down the road to where the first of our men are begin to approach. We meet each other's eyes, knowing that it's time. I give a slow, deep nod to my brother, and then he slides the manhole cover to the side so that I can slip in. I drop to the floor of the curving sewer below, all of my senses on high alert for anything odd, anything strange.

But as I look around, scenting the air, there's nothing off – and nothing fresh. No signs of anyone here now, or anyone around in the past few hours. When I'm sure, I look up at my brother, who peers through the entrance above me. Then I beckon with my hand.

Come, my gesture implies. It's clear. Or, it is at least for now.

Roger drops into the sewer with me and then we prowl forward, our hands free and our hackles raised. The wolf within me is on high alert, a growl already rumbling in his chest, his eyes sharp, his teeth sharper. As we move forward, I hear my men start to enter the sewer as well, tiny splashes letting me know as each one arrives.

We decided on a team of sixteen, with Roger and I at the head of it. Enough troops to arrive as a force, but not so large that we could truly lose track of them. Each of our men carries a weapon – some guns, some close- combat tools like knives and tasers. Roger and I, however, carry only ourselves. Our

wolves are more powerful than anything we're likely to meet. We're each weapon enough.

Slowly, we move forward, the map of the sewer that I've memorized aligning perfectly with the reality. We turn to the left when we come to a junction, and I hold up a fist in the air, asking my team to stop. This, I know, is where the test really begins. Because the priest's lair is just up ahead.

Slowly, I turn to survey our forces and count twelve men behind us, which is good. Two, I know, are standing outside at the entrance as guards.

Slowly, so everyone can see, I move my hand to my shoulder and flip the switch on the radio that's there attached to the strap of my bullet-proof vest with velcro. Everyone else does the same, ensuring that we'll be able to stay in touch if anyone is separated.

As I turn back towards our target, I think that it's not so important if we're quiet anymore – Because there's no going back now.

I signal my forces to move forward now, walking more quickly now, my boots splashing through the water as I head directly for the door that I know is 100 feet forward and to the left. Roger snarls beside me, a wicked sound, as we approach –

50 feet now, and we're almost running -25, and it's a charge –

I roar as we turn the corner towards the lair, ready to rip to shreds anyone that I find inside – But as I turn towards the door, ready to throw it open, I find that it's already ajar dangling off its hinges. My heart pounds with unused adrenaline as I survey the scene before me and realize –

“Shit,” Roger snaps, storming into the empty room and looking around. “We're too fucking late.” Another growl is my only reply as I signal my troops to stop the charge and set up a perimeter around the door, which they quickly do. Then, I step inside with my brother, looking around.

The room is not spotless – there are still scraps of paper around, beat up tables and chairs that the priest was clearly using to set up his potions or whatever it was he was doing down here.

“God damn it,” Roger curses, pounding a fist against the wall.

"It's not totally lost," I say, turning around and surveying the room. "There are some things here that could be useful..."

"Dominic," Roger says, exasperated, and I turn to see him rolling his eyes at me. "He took everything that could tell us anything."

"No, brother," I say, my mouth curling into a grin as I lift my nose and scent the air. "He left us one thing..."

And then, intrigued, Roger lifts his nose as well and takes a moment to detect it as well. "You're right," he says, bringing his eyes back to mine with a flash of pleasure.

"We have a scent," I growl, and then I look at him curiously. "What do you think?" I ask. "Is it...likely that he would have stuck around?"

"He had a lot of stuff, Dominic," Roger replies, considering. "If he wanted to keep it all, needed it close, is it possible that he didn't go far?"

Perhaps...another part of the sewer, hoping that we'll assume it's a lost cause?"

"It's worth following it up," I say, grinning a little at the idea that the case is still on. "Would you like to take the honor? Or should I?"

"Oh please," Roger growls, his voice low and eager. "Let me."

I nod and, with a flash, Roger transforms into his wolf, shaking his fur loose as soon as he does as if he's been eager to do this for hours, to become the animal that's been prowling within him, eager to protect his family, his mate, his new baby.

I step back and watch Roger work as he moves slowly around the room, sniffing everything, his intensified senses picking up more of the priest's scent than our human bodies are capable of doing. Then, when he's ready, Roger lifts his eyes to mine and nods his snout once.

"All right," I say, gesturing towards the door. "Lead the way."

Eagerly, Roger prowls out, his gigantic wolf so tall that his shoulders nearly coming even with my chest. Our troops move aside to make room for Roger as he turns into the sewer, looking left down the long aisle. I signal my troops

for their attention, which they give me eagerly, and then point down the hall after Roger's retreating form, signaling that we will follow.

As one, the troops nod, and we start off with Roger in the lead and me close behind.

Accidental Surrogate Chapter 348-I give our troops outside of the sewer updates on our movements, letting them know when we take left and right turns, all the time following Roger, who steadily pads along, tracing the priest's scent. The troops outside relay the information back to my father, in the bunker, who is able to trace our movement on the maps so that he, at least, knows precisely where we are at all times.

About half an hour later, Roger looks over his shoulder at me, his eyes suddenly fierce and I nod, understanding his message. We're close very close now.

I raise a hand above my shoulder, making the signal that tells my troops to be on alert, ready for action. Behind me, I can almost feel their bodies tensing, becoming ready to react.

As a group, we continue to prowl through the sewers, making as little noise as we can. Roger turns a corner and I am just on his tail, looking around, when suddenly I see light again – bright golden light, a significant contrast to the grey mossy sewer around us. We pause for a moment and listen, hearing – god, what is that?

Some kind of clanging rings from an open door on the left almost exactly like the one we just left. Roger was right the priest needed to set up shop – again. A clanging comes from inside the room, hitting an unnatural pitch that hurts my ears – I see Roger visibly wince and move toward him, but suddenly quite suddenly –

A figure emerges from the room – And, as one, Roger and I act.

Roger is in the air almost instantly, a snarl ripping from his throat as he leaps for the priest. I shout a command for our troops to surround, to contain

The priest's face is shocked, stunned as he spins towards us, as Roger's body collides with his, Roger's paws slamming into his shoulders and knocking the priest hard to the floor, holding him down in the slushy grey water –

I'm moving towards them, a shout on my lips, seeking to get behind the Priest to block the obvious direction of his exit should he seek to run – and as I move past him I see the moment his face changes from surprise and fear to fury, to menace, to a gleeful kind of hate.

I successfully block his exit, my own body tensed for any action, as Roger lowers his snarling face to the priests, warning him with body if not with words to stay still-

But the priest bares his own teeth and angles his hand up, pointed towards Roger's chest, and then he says some archaic word –

And there is a blast of light, of heat, of fire that blinds me, makes me turn my head away for a split second before I hear a yelp of fear and pain. And as I snap my face back towards the priest I see Roger soaring upwards through the air, his back and shoulders slamming into the low sewer ceiling before gravity pulls him back down –

But the priest is fast –

Before Roger's body can fall back down on top of him the priest has twisted to the side and turns, predictably, towards me – away from the troops he can see ranging in the direction from which we came.

The priest freezes when he sees me there, waiting for him, a slow and terrible grin spreading across my face as I focus my attention on him, resisting the horrible temptation to look towards my brother, who I can see struggling to find his feet behind the priest –

"Let's try this again," I growl as I focus on the priest's face, recognizing him instantly as the man we captured before – the one who was in my house during the attack on my child –

The priest feints left but doesn't fool me – I'm bigger than he is, far bigger, and have no reason to shift my position before he tries to get past me, which he does next. But as the priest goes right, seeking to slip by me and make a run for it, I grab his left arm and twist it up behind his back as I grab his right shoulder, working to incapacitate him.

It works, for a moment – before the priest growls another one of those arcane words and I feel a pulse of burning heat coming from his left hand, his wrist

suddenly becoming white hot- way too hot for me to hold, lest my skin begin to melt

I roar at the pain and the frustration but hold on long enough to spin him around, pushing him hard towards the door emitting the yellow light instead of the long corridor – if we can get him in there, we can trap him –

The priest yells as he stumbles a few steps and then stops himself by grabbing the door frame. He sends a frantic glance over his shoulder towards us and then throws himself into the room, reaching for something-

“MOVE!” I roar to my troops, who have been waiting, tense, for precisely that order. And they do – quickly, my men spread out around the door, ready to trap him in. As they get in order, as I watch the first two of my troops enter the room to attempt to incapacitate the Priest, I also turn to Rodger, desperate to assess his condition.

As I turn to him, though, I see that he’s already standing by my side, growling at the door, likewise assessing the situation in a flash. I reach out towards him, sniffing, smelling something strange, and as I lay my hand on his fur he looks up at me and I see that under his chin – his chest – his belly as well, likely – his skin is a mess of seared flesh.

“Christ, Roger,” I breathe, starting to bend to look at him, but he snaps his teeth at me – clearly communicating to leave it, that he’s all right.

“Okay,” I say, making the quick decision to allow him to decide his limits for himself. “Just go easy, all ri-”

But before I can finish my sentence, screams erupt from inside the room and Roger and I barrel forward, our bodies instantly alert.

When we get inside we see that almost all of our troops are pressing the priest back against the far wall where he hurls spell after spell at them – some landing against the bodies of my men, some spells dying in the air

But where they do land – My eyes go wide as I see the magic slicing, burning, ripping, tearing –

And then, on more instinct than anything else, I roar and transform into my wolf as I throw myself across the room, heading directly for him. My eyes shift

to my wolf vision in an instant and focus on the priest's face just as he sees me coming, just as his eyes go wide-

And he opens his mouth, taking a deep breath, winding back his arm to throw something at me something big-

But I'm faster than him, faster than he thought I was. And my body slams into his just as the start of the spell falls from his lips – searing my skin but not cutting me down –

His head hits the wall, hard, and he groans, collapsing to the ground beneath me. In another flash I transform back into my body, whipping a knife from my side and pressing it tight against his throat.

“Submit,” I growl, glaring down at him. But he just grins – grins up at me through his pain – and I notice, too late, his hand clenching in a sack of powder that spilled conveniently open at his side.

“Not a chance in hell,” he snarls, “the master will have his boy!”

And then he whips his hand up – scattering the dust and saying a single word that lights the entire room on fire. I scream in pain, but my voice is barely audible –

I feel my body and my mind crushed under the screams of all of my men, and my brother, crying out along with me.

Accidental Surrogate Chapter 349-Ella

“It's been too long,” I mutter, twisting my fingers together with my eyes fixed on the hard iron door of the bunker. I have one hand on Rafe's little carrier as he sleeps peacefully beside the two uncomfortable chairs that Cora and I dragged down the hall, wanting to be as close to the entrance as possible so that we get news as soon as it comes.

“Ella,” Cora seethes through her teeth. “You have got to stop saying that. You're making me freak out.”

“It's not me that's making you flip out,” I retort, angry. “It's our idiot mates, who insisted on leaving here four hours ago and haven't called once to let us know that they're all right -”

But then, as if my words are magic, the door bangs open and Cora and I instantly leap up from our seats.

I gasp, almost breaking into tears when I see that the first figure through the door is my mate. I hurl myself towards Sinclair, intent on wrapping him in my arms, but I come to a skidding stop as I realize that he's carrying one of his men, unconscious and bloody and

"Oh my god," I gasp, my hands flying to my mouth as I stop and actually look at my mate. I notice the burns that have ripped through his clothes, leaving red welts across his exposed skin

Notice the horrible burned flesh of the man in his arms –

Sinclair's eyes linger on me for half a longing second before moving sharply to my sister. "Cora," he gasps, "help – it's bad –"

She rushes to him in a moment, assessing the soldier, but Sinclair jerks him away, shaking his head. "No, Cora," he insists, making her look up at him. "We need – we need space them-" all of

I gasp again, horrified now as I understand what my mate means, as I see my sister's face go pale. But she snaps immediately into her professional demeanor, looking to me.

"Ella?" she snaps. "You're my nurse now, all right?"

"Y-yes," I hurry to agree, eager to help and reaching down to grab Rafe's carrier and sling it over my right arm.

"Your largest room," she demands, turning her attention back to Sinclair. Then she turns, pointing down the hall. "Go, now."

As Sinclair begins to move, more of the men begin to stumble through the door. The hall is immediately filled with the sound of pain – moans, and groans, cries –

But to her credit, Cora doesn't look back, storming forward, ready to get things prepared. I can't help myself from turning towards the injured men who stumble through the door, my attention immediately going to the red-haired young man the one who spoke in the meeting, who noticed that my attackers didn't shift as he falls hard against the wall, gasping.

I move to him immediately, working to sling his arm around my shoulder, taking as much of his weight as I can. Lean on me," I demand, beginning to move forward as I feel his body shift hard against mine. It's heavy,

struggling under his weight, trying to also balance Rafe's carrier against my other arm, hoping to hell that he doesn't collapse against me and squish the baby when we both fall –

But we make it – following the men who can walk by themselves through the door into what looks more like a

barracks than the small private bedroom that Sinclair and I have to ourselves. I look around swiftly and see my mate settling the man who cannot walk into a single bed and, seeing other men taking seats on bed and chairs around the room, I move the young man on my shoulder to the closest bed, holding steady while he takes his weight off of me and collapses there.

"Are you all right?" I ask, leaning over him, worried

"I'll be fine," he groans, waving a hand at me. "It hurts but it's nothing bad – thank you, Luna," he murmurs, leaning his head back against the pillow and squeezing his eyes tight in pain.

I nod to him, making a mental note to come check again soon, but I can't help myself from moving swiftly away, holding my baby's carrier in two hands now as I hurry over to my mate who is standing now, talking briskly to Cora.

"Are you all right?" I gasp, unable to stop myself from pressing myself up against him and raising a hand to touch his scorched cheek.

"I'm fine, Ella," Sinclair assures me, turning his intense gaze to me for one long, lingering second, clearly relishing the sight of me before he turns his eyes to Rafe, who cries a little in his carrier. Sinclair lingers, looking at his son, for just for a moment before looking over to the door. "I'm sorry," he says, rushed, "I have to go help -"

"Of course," I say, touching Sinclair lightly on the arm and urging him forward.

But, quick, urgent, Cora stops Sinclair by grabbing his hand. He turns to her, torn, wanting to go and help his men but –

"Roger," she breathes, her eyes worried.

“He’s fine,” Sinclair replies, brisk, looking steadily into her eyes for a split second. “He’s out helping some of the worst hurt get out of the cars -”

“Okay,” Cora says, her voice shaking as she exhales a deep breath and stands for a moment with her eyes closed, collecting herself. “Okay.”

And then, the moment passed, Cora’s eyes fly open again and she’s all business. She nods her chin towards the door, urging Sinclair forward, and he moves quickly away. Then she turns to me. “I need you to start moving clockwise around the room,” she says, a calm efficiency setting over her. “You call out to me if anyone looks like they need me desperately – otherwise, you ask each man his name and what’s wrong. Take notes,” she says, looking around and then grabbing a pen and pad of paper off a little bookshelf.

“Okay,” I exhale, and as I take the writing materials from her I realize that my hands are shaking.

“Hold it together, sis,” Cora says quietly, stepping close to me for a moment and taking my face in her hands, looking at me steadily. “You’ve got this. All right?”

I nod to her, anxious, and then we both move at once, her left and me right, to begin to help.

Time passes in a flash as I move from man to man, asking each what they need, getting it for them if it’s in my power but otherwise writing down what each man says before moving to the next. The only thing that interrupts my attention is Cora’s brief cry – just once as Roger comes into the room. He, too, is carrying a soldier who cannot walk and Cora is at his side in a second.

There’s a brief moment, after Roger gets the man to a bed, where Cora kisses him, pressing her body flush against his, but then it’s done –

My sister is the doctor again, ready to care, to help –

And I’m so grateful for her in that moment that I can barely breathe. And as I look at Roger’s face as he takes a second to watch her, I know that he feels precisely the same.

As I turn to the next man in my rotation, I feel a little hope swell in me, so glad that Roger and Cora found each other. Because the four of us, as a team? We can do this. I have so much faith that we can.

Accidental Surrogate Chapter 350-Cora

It's hours, hours later when I finally have a moment to step back and breathe. And when I do, I feel my head spin and stumble back a step or two. Roger is there, instantly, his hand on my back.

"Cora," he says, pulling me closer to him, tilting up my face so that he can study me. "Are you all right? You're –"

"I'm fine," I mutter, frustrated, trying to push away and get back to work. I have a moment to breathe, but honestly there's so much more that – needs to be done for these men –

"No," Roger says, stubborn. "You're pushing yourself too far – you're pregnant, Cora –"

"Roger," I sigh, turning to glare at him in earnest now and putting a hand on his chest. "This cannot be the refrain that I hear for the next nine – or six or however many months, all right? I am not going to stop doing my job-stop healing people – just because I'm pregnant."

I hear Roger begin to growl in protest but I lock my teeth together, staring up at him, hard. And, slowly, I see him start to relent, to remember the person who he chose as his mate.

"This is my life, Roger," I whisper, "my identity. I'm a doctor – I made an oath! I'm going to help them."

"All right," he replies, taking a step back. "But Cora, please –"

"I know," I say, nodding and starting to look around the room. "I'll be careful – I'll stop before I'm totally exhausted. I won't put myself or the baby at risk."

"And how close are you to exhaustion now?" he asks, looking me over from top to bottom, his eyes pausing on my stomach.

I take a moment to pause, closing my eyes and checking in with myself. Honestly, I'm not far off – but there's still so much that these men need. Honestly the extent of the burns that they came in with some of them down to the bone – I cringe to even think of it.

“Can I...” I hear Roger ask, and then when I look up at him again I feel him place his hand against my stomach.

“Okay,” I breathe, nodding a little as I agree to stay still so he can check in on the baby. Roger closes his eyes and concentrates and I’m a little sorry as I see that it’s hard for him. I remember the way that Sinclair communicated with Rafe while Ella was pregnant it seemed...simpler.

Roger has much more connection with the baby when he’s touching me and when he concentrates, but...I do wish it was easier for him. I want him to have the full fatherhood experience, with all of its blessings. And it breaks my heart that my body – my humanness has taken a little of that away from him.

“Baby’s okay,” Roger murmurs, opening his eyes and leaning forward to press his lips against my forehead. “Just...let’s not push, all right?”

“Okay,” I agree, nodding. And then I turn to him fully, peering at some of the red skin on his face. “How is your healing going?”

“Slow,” he murmurs, his voice not much more than a growl. “Much slower than usual. Like whatever that priest did to hurt us like this had its own curse attached.”

I nod, listening, and then turn my attention to Roger’s forearms, which were the worst blistered. Slowly, I unwrap the bandage on one and he hisses at the pain of it. I get a brief glimpse of the skin below before I wrap him back up. “You’re healing,” I say, looking up at him, “but yes, the pace is ...worse than what I would have hoped for a werewolf. Especially one of your abilities.”

“It will be all right,” he sighs, I think being brave for me. As Roger puts a sweet, concerned hand on the side of my face, Ella comes over. “Cora,” she whispers, glancing around the room. “What can I do?”

I turn to her, my poor tired sister, and open my arms out, inviting her in for a hug which she happily accepts. “How is Sinclair?” I ask, looking to the corner of the room where her mate naps lightly, Rafe secure in his arms even as he sleeps. Sinclair’s burns were worse than Rogers, but likewise superficial compared to some that their men faced. Only the two men who waited outside of the sewer came out unscathed.

“I think he’s all right,” Ella replies when she pulls away from me. “More his pride hurt than anything, and he’s frustrated,” she says, giving a chagrined

little smile to Roger. "I know you guys are disappointed that the priest got away."

"Such a missed opportunity," Roger murmurs, shaking his head. "And he burned all of his supplies on his way out, along with us, so we don't have much information from the misadventure either." He sighs, full of regret.

"Your dad seems to be optimistic about the interviews," I point out, nodding towards where Henry is rolling between the beds, speaking kindly to any of the men who are conscious and willing to report what they heard and saw. "He's sure you'll get something good out of it."

"Not enough to compensate our losses," Roger murmurs, looking around. "We are so...so lucky that everyone came out alive."

Alive, I think, but certainly not unscathed. Roger and Sinclair, I suspect, came out of the situation relatively unharmed because of their genetics. As with the size of their wolves, their access to some of the other wolf powers – increased sense of smell, quick reflexes, the ability to heal – are likewise amplified. I wonder if, really, that ability to heal is what saved them their bodies burned out their magic working to protect their skin and, because they have what can best be described as more magic, they came out with minor burns while some of the others...

I go a little pale as I look around and realize, again, that some of these men will bear these scars for life, and at least three will require major reconstructive surgery. As soon as possible.

And, as much as Roger won't want to hear it....there's really only one person who is best going to be able to perform those surgeries. I'm still wondering how best to bring this up when Ella produces the perfect lead-in for me.

"Cora," she says, wiping a hand across her brow. "Are you all right? Are you tired?" I fight my instinct to point out that Ella, as a nursing mother, has just as much at stake in her exhaustion as me, but instead I take up the thread.

"I can keep going for a little bit," I say, holding her gaze. She has been such a good, stalwart little nurse today honestly, I think she missed a bit of her calling in not going into that field. "But I'm not going to be able to keep going all night. And some of these men they're going to need extended care."

Ella bites her lip and nods, understanding, glancing between me and Roger. "What should we do?" she turns to Sinclair. "Should we wake him? Ask him if he has ideas?"

"No," I say, reaching out to take Ella's hand as she impulsively begins to move towards her mate. "Honestly, Ella," I say, and then I turn to Roger, because my words are actually addressed to him. "We need...more help. We need more hands."

Roger instantly sees the direction that my thoughts are heading in and his eyes go dark, narrowing at me. "No way in hell," he snaps, starting to shake his head. "Roger," I plead, moving close to him. "Don't make this about jealousy – we need him –"

"Need who?" Ella asks, confused.

"Hank," I say, turning towards her and sighing. "We need Hank."