

## ACCIDENTAL SURROGATE FOR ALPHA

Accidental Surrogate Chapter 396-Stormy Secrets Ella Cora glares at Roger, her arms crossed, as he almost literally rolls with laughter inside of the RV, doubling over so hard he has to lay back on the white leather cushions of the kitchenette. "I still don't see what's so funny about this," Cora snaps. I wrap my arm around Sinclair's waist, grinning widely and listening to the furious sound of the rain pouring on the RV.

I can feel my mate chuckle a little, likewise enjoying the scene. "It's just too good, Cora!" Roger says between laughs as his father shakes his head, also smiling, and rolls away into the living area with Rafe in his lap, clearly not wanting his daughter-in-law to see the amusement on his face. "What!" Cora snaps, and I have to cover my mouth to hide my own laughter when I see how pissed she's getting. The rain hits harder, now including little bits of hail.

"It's just," Roger says, working hard to sit up and wiping a tear of mirth from his eye, "we had no idea you could control the weather -" another burst of laughter"- but you wanted meso bad that you created a hurricane-" he roars with it again "- just to trap me in a motel, so you could get me in bed "Oh my god!" Cora snaps, blushing beet red and striding forward a few steps to smack him on the arm, which just makes him laugh harder.

I have to turn my face in Sinclair's shoulder now – because as much as I want to support my sister, Roger is totally right. And it's hilarious. Sinclair wraps an arm around me, holding me tight, openly laughing himself and watching with glee as the scene unfolds before us.

"It's true!" Roger continues as the wind howls around us, shaking the RV a little bit with Cora's embarrassed rage. "For heaven's sake, Cora – you didn't have to nearly drown us to get me in bed, a little light rain would have done it – you could have just given us a flat tire – " Growling a little and still blushing hard, Cora climbs onto the little kitchen bench seat, reaching out to smack Roger again, though he scoots away from her.

"Shut up!" she mutters, "or I'll strike you with lightning next!" "Do we even need that kind of foreplay, Cora? You're already knocked up -" Cora emits an enraged, embarrassed little shriek and begins to swat at Roger, which has us all howling with laughter. My whole body shakes against Sinclair's as I give up pretending and laugh so hard that my sides hurt. Because, as much as

Cora hates it, Roger's reading of her is perfectly accurate – she was so pent up emotionally, and loved him so much, that something about it must have activated her gift that day. The storm wasn't sent by some dark force – it was just Cora's own dramatic way of creating a space where she and Roger could be alone together, where they had to face their truth.

The wind and the rain abates a little as Roger pulls Cora into his lap and holds her tight, pinning her arms to her side so she can't hit him anymore, even though I'm sure he didn't feel any pain. He talks to her softly, still laughing and teasing her in the way she needs to be teased but likewise letting her know that he thinks she's amazing, and marvelous, and that if he'd had the same power he'd have done the exact same thing weeks before.

"Precisely right," Cora growls, pressing herself close to him and nudging his cheek with her nose in a particularly wolfish way. "You're just jealous of my powers." "Yes, little demigoddess," he murmurs, kissing her forehead but still grinning with his glee. "I'd have frozen you away in a little igloo jail made entirely of ice until you gave into me – ""Do you think I can do that?" she asks suddenly, lifting her head and looking at him eagerly.

"I mean, rain I can obviously do but do you think I can do ice as well?" "Well you just made it hail," he says with a shrug. "I did?" she gasps, eager, looking up at the ceiling. "I, for one," I say, pitching my voice a bit loud to remind them that they're not the only ones in the room, especially as I see Roger's hand slipping a bit lower on Cora's waist than he'd usually venture in mixed company.

Cora and Roger turn to me, curious, and I smile widely at them, still excited that my sister has figured out her gift. "Well?" Cora asks, grinning at me.

"I think that you probably can do ice," I continue, cocking my head. "Do you remember when, that awful night, the faux priestess froze me to the floor? Well, when mom unlocked my gift, I was able to melt the ice. And that has nothing to do with healing powers, so," I give a little shrug, looking up at Sinclair, seeing what he thinks. "Maybe it's... the crossover that mom was talking about? How all of our gifts are connected, but we can only do a little of what each other can do?" "Interesting," Cora murmurs, looking down at her hands as if she can read the magic there. Then she holds her hands out towards Roger, her fingers splayed wide. "What are you doing?" he asks quietly. "Trying to freeze you," she murmurs, concentrating. "What!" he gasps, smacking her hands away, which just makes her laugh. "Well, I would have stopped," she says, rolling her eyes, "before I gave you frostbite. Or killed you

or whatever.” “Let’s...not experiment,” he murmurs, looking at her like she’s a little crazy, “with that too much.” “Don’t laugh at me so much,” she says, leaning closer and giving him a wicked grin. “And I won’t be tempted to.” Roger snarls a little and grabs her by the chin, planting a solid kiss on her mouth, and Sinclair sighs and turns me away. “Do you think,” my mate murmurs in my ear, “that we can sneak in and steal the bedroom while they’re distract-” “Not a chance!” Roger shouts from behind us. I laugh and then groan as Roger scoops Cora up in his arms and carries her to the back of the RV, both of them cackling victoriously the whole way. Sighing, I lean back against my mate and glare at little at the couch which shifts into a queen-sized bed which is neither big enough for both of us nor very comfortable. “Guess you’re stuck out here with me,” Henry says, wheeling over and grinning up at us.

“Oh, we don’t mind that,” I say, smiling warmly at him and hoping he didn’t take it that way. “After all, you can wake up with little Mr. Fuss,” I coo, leaning down to smile at my baby, “when he gets up at 2 am! For absolutely no reason!” “More than happy to,” Henry agrees with a smile, tickling Rafe’s belly with his fingertips and making our little boy laugh. “Any time.” And I bite my lip a little as I take Sinclair’s hand, loving how much Henry and Rafe are already connected.

Family, after all, is everything to me now that I’ve got it. I’m so, so incredibly grateful that Cora and I have been so embraced by people who love us so much. “Come on, trouble,” Sinclair sighs, starting to turn out the beds. The wind picks up outside the RV and lightning strikes close by. We all ignore it, not allowing ourselves to consider, really, what it means. “We’ve got a long road tomorrow.” And I sigh as I help him, because I know it’s true. And I am not looking forward to the return of the highway and everything that awaits us at home.

Accidental Surrogate Chapter 397-The Long Road Home Ella “No more road trips,” I grumble under my breath, trying to rock my little baby in my arms and distract him from the rumbling of the road, “ever again.” “Don’t be so sore about it,” Cora says, moving one of her checkers forward a space. “At least we got the information we were coming for.” “Well that I will never begrudge,” I say, turning my head and smiling at her. “But next time?” She grins, anticipating what I’m going to say next. “We’re taking a private jet.” Cora laughs, shaking her head at me and sitting back against the backrest of her seat in the kitchenette. “That would be a waste of resources, and it’s probably too short of a flight or something to mom’s temple,” she sighs.

"Well then one of our children," I huff, leaning forward to study the board, "is going to have to learn to bend time and space, because I am not suffering through this again." But before I can even finish my sentence, Roger at the driver's seat hits a huge bump and the game board goes flying in the air, pieces scattering despite their magnetic bond. I groan and sit back against my own seat as Cora sighs and picks up the pieces, putting them back in the box. We both know that particular distraction is over. "Sorry!" Roger calls over his shoulder. "Won't happen again!" "He just knew I was beathing you," I grumble as Sinclair comes and sits next to me. "Why did you let him drive, anyway? You're better at it than he is." "Oh, no he's not," Cora murmurs, defending her mate, but Sinclair and I ignore her.

"He insisted," Sinclair tells me with a shrug, reaching for the baby. "And you know how he gets when he feels like he's not getting his turn with the toy." I laugh a little, handing the baby over to my mate who smiles down at his grumpy son. "I agree though," Sinclair says, smiling at me now and reaching out to tuck a strand of my hair behind my ear. "Next time? All luxury. We'll get you all drunk at the airport so you don't even remember the flight, and then we'll spend the rest of our time luxuriating." "This had better be a promise," I murmur, leaning against him and closing my eyes. "You got it, baby," he whispers, kissing the top of my head. "Hey, so," Cora says, and I open my eyes to see her leaning across the table, her attention focused mostly on Sinclair. "Where are we going, anyway?" "Um, home?" he says, frowning at her. "Yeah," she says, cocking her head to the side, "but...like, bunker home? Horribly uncomfortable clinic home?"

Your home, the house of a thousand corpses?" Sinclair laughs a little. "Those are gone now," he says, waving a hand and smiling. "We have a very... particular service which helps us with those kinds of needs." "Oh weird," I say, sitting up and looking at him with curiosity. "What is that job interview like?" "Information above your pay grade," he says, smiling and patting my knee. "So, we're going to the house?" Cora asks, interested. "Is that...safe?" "Well," Sinclair considers seriously, "we're pretty damn sure that the Cult itself doesn't have any particular problem with us – that they were merely serving Xander, probably because he supplied them with a great deal of money and resources."

But now that we've put a serious dent in the Cult's resources and manpower, and Xander has fled," he shrugs, "we don't see any reason not to go back to the city."

We're keeping a close eye on it, but I think it's time to start our lives again." "It has to be more complicated than that," I say, shaking my head and frowning at him. "Xander isn't going to rest -" "No, he's not," Sinclair agrees, looking at me seriously. "But we aren't without resources, love. We only went to the bunker because we didn't know what we were up against.

But now that our enemy is on the run, it is a good a time as any to regroup and focus on the interrupted task: ensuring this country is united under a single King." "And that's you, right?" Cora asks, looking at him curiously. "Well, we hope so," he says, grinning at her. "Do you have any objections?" "Are the people of this nation aware," she says, "that their King eats all the chips?

And does not bother to consider whether his sister-in-law wanted any?" Sinclair grins and leans forward. "Are they likewise aware, that said sister-in law ate all of the chocolate chip cookies Cora gasps, appalled. "Unfair!" she says. "This sister-in-law is pregnant!" "Enough!" I groan, especially as Rafe starts to fuss more in Sinclair's arms. I raise my hands to my temples and rub them gently as my mate and my sister fall silent, grinning at each other. "I cannot take argument on top of traveling in a sardine can. Also, it is smelly in here." "Truce, then," Cora sighs. "So, house?" I say, likewise curious as I look up at my mate. "House," he says with a nod. "... for now." I frown at him, intrigued, but he sends a little pulse down the bond which shushes me, letting me know he wants to have a private conversation instead of one with Cora. I nod and give him a little kiss on the shoulder before resting my head in the same spot. "So, what do you think," Cora asks, looking down at her hands again and opening and closing them as if she can see her gift sparking there. "Am I going to be able to shoot lightening bolts at people? Or not?" "You can do anything you put your mind to," I say placatingly to my sister, grinning, imagining how very much she'd like to zap everyone who got on her nerves. "I've actually been meaning to talk to you about that," Sinclair says.

"Really?" she asks, her eyes going wide with curiosity." Sure," he says, giving a little shrug and leaning forward to engage her more completely. "Considering that I'm likely to become the King of a nation that's going to have a lot of military concerns, I wonder if you'd be willing to consider experimenting with your gift and seeing how it could be used... well, as a kind of weapon." "Really!?" she says again, more eager now. "I never thought of it like that -" "Cora!" I scold, sitting up straight and frowning between my mate and my sister.

"You're a doctor! You shouldn't be thinking about hurting people with your gift!" "Chill out, Ella," she murmurs, leaning back in her seat and frowning at me. "I'm not actually going to strike people down with lightning bolts, but Sinclair is right – this could be strategically useful." "Creating a hurricane in the face of an advancing Navy," Sinclair offers, turning to me with a shrug. "Or even, on the day of a battle, ensuring that the other troops are rained on while ours stay dry this could turn the tide in any war." I go a little pale thinking about it, looking down at my baby. I've had enough of war, and I certainly don't want him raised in a world filled with it. "Do you really think we're headed for situations like that?" I ask, my voice soft. Sinclair lifts a hand and softly strokes my hair, sympathy clear on his face. "I'm sorry to say it, love," he gently replies, "but I think so."

We're not coming to power in a time of peace. We can fight for that but...we have to fight." I sigh, looking down at the table, worried all over again. "But at least they've got us," Cora says, leaning over the table and offering her hand. I look up at her, not really understanding what she means. She shrugs. "You and I want peace. So do these three," she says, nodding her head to indicate the Sinclair men. "Put together, we're...kind of a force to be reckoned with. I'd rather be fighting for peace than letting others decide for us." "I get it," I mumble, sinking back in my chair with another sigh. "I just... want more for our children than that." "We'll give it to them," Sinclair promises, and I look up into his eyes, wanting to believe him very much. "Together, we'll make this world what it should be for their sake, as well as everyone else's." Slowly, I nod, agreeing to the plan. I take my sister's offered hand and give it a squeeze. And the RV continues to rumble down the road, driving us back to the city where this all started. The city, and that nation, and the world that is ours to shape if we're willing to fight for it.

Accidental Surrogate Chapter 398-A New Home Ella A few days later, after Sinclair and I have had some time to dwell and consult and decide, we invite Roger and Cora over to our little house early one morning.

We're both standing out front waiting for them, Rafe all dressed up in blue and white in my arms.

I grin down at my baby, so pleased to finally be back home, to be able to dress him in all of the clothes I ordered for him during my long weeks of bedrest. This kid has an amazing wardrobe already, but of course he wasn't able to wear it – and heartbreakingly grew out of some of it during our time away in the bunker.



"He's getting really big," I murmur to Sinclair, shifting my baby higher in my arm.

"Theyouin him is starting to come out." Sinclair grins and looks down at the baby. "He'll be six feet in no time. My little linebacker." "Better not be," I grumble, but I'm unable to help from smiling down at my little cutie. "He needs to stay my little beachball baby for awhile yet. At least another sixteen years. " "Don't count on it," Sinclair sighs. "I got my growth spurt early. He'll be taller than you by fourth grade." "No," I gasp, spinning to look up at him in horror. My mate just shrugs, laughing at me and implying that it's inevitable, but then he lifts his chin towards the driveway where Roger's car is pulling in. I take a deep breath as I turn to watch them, and then I consider something out loud. " Do you know," I say, "I've never actually seen Roger's apartment." They've been staying there for the past few days, Cora happy to abandon her own rather bland apartment. "You're better off," Sinclair replies, raising his eyebrows. "Bachelor city." "Neon signs?" I ask, wrinkling my nose. ( Collection of commemorative beer glasses?" "Everything you're imagining," Sinclair sighs, sinking his hands into his pockets as Cora and Roger park and climb out of their car, and worse." "Barf," I murmur, and then I look back down at my baby again.

"Don't worry, Rafey. We'll never let you live like that." "Hi!" Cora says cheerfully, coming over to us and kissing me on the cheek before snatching Rafe out of my arms, cooing to her godson and saying hello. "What, nothing for me?" Sinclair says, grinning – while he's clearly pleased that she, like us, loves the baby so much, he's not turning away the opportunity to tease her. Cora just waves a dismissive hand at Sinclair while Roger likewise kisses me on the cheek and gives his brother a hug. "Is there breakfast?" Roger asks. "Cora can't cook. I'm starving – haven't eaten for days." "My skills lay elsewhere!" Cora calls over her shoulder, dancing away a little to show Rafe some of the little flowers that are starting to sprout up in the garden. " Sure," Sinclair says, laughing and nodding towards the open door behind us.

"Come on in. We made some changes we're curious to see what you think." "Really?" Roger asks as the three of us troupe in together, Cora following behind with the baby. "You weren't satisfied with the blood-and- horror theme that you'd gone with in your bedroom?" But his mouth falls open, his saucy attitude leaving him as he looks around the living room at the entrance of our house, which has been completely redecorated in shades of blue and grey with luxurious brown leather furniture.

"Wow," he says, his eyes going wide. "You guys you really worked fast with some changes," "Do you like them?" I ask eagerly, winding my arm tightly around Sinclair's as Cora comes to my side.

"I love it," she says, looking around at the antique Audubon bird prints that we've used to decorate the walls. "It's so...simple, and chic. But also warm." She looks at me with both love and jealousy in her eyes. "You're so good at this stuff, Ella," she sighs. "I wish I could do this." "It's a gift," I say, laughing as I throw my hair over my shoulder. "Come look upstairs!" And then I grab her hand and pull her and the baby after me. I can hear Roger and Sinclair following behind us. "I see that you've kept the stair lift," Cora murmurs, laughing a little. "Well, that's useful for Henry," I say as we reach the top of the steps, tossing a grin over my shoulder. "Plus, very fun." Then I pull her into the bedroom, which has likewise been totally redone in a thousand shades of white, beige, and blush. Cora gasps when she sees the gigantic bed with its too-plush comforter, the cozy white fur rug, even the electric fireplace that we've had installed on one wall. "Oh my god," she sighs, stepping into the room and turning around. Then, she sees the closet, which we've had.

completely refitted to better accommodate two people's clothing.

"This is incredible," Roger agrees, stepping into the room and looking around with what I can only think of as jealousy in his own eyes. I clap a little, jumping up and down as I see them admire the space. "Though I have to admit," he says, turning back to his brother. "This doesn't feel as good as the last room did." Sinclair just shrugs, a little smirk on his lips. "We decided it was time for a change." "Ella," Cora says, frowning as she peeks into the closet – which now has a chandelier, a station for jewelry, and a full-length mirror...but no clothing in it, not a single piece. "Why... why is this empty?" She turns back to the room as well. "And where is all of Rafe's stuff? His changing table – his bassinet -" And I squeal a little bit as I see her figuring out our surprise.

"We decided," Sinclair repeats, "that it was time for a rather big change." Cora stares at us confused. But Roger gasps, putting it all together faster than his mate. "Oh, my god," he moans, stumbling back a step and looking around at the room again. He focuses, in particular, on the painting that we placed above the fireplace. It's subtle still in light colors to match the rest of the room – but clearly portrays a summer storm above a forest. "No, guys – you didn't -" "What?" Cora asks again, coming to my side, and I take her hand. "We're moving into the palace, Cora," I say softly, beaming at her. "We want...we did all of this for you." "What!?" she gasps, apparently unable to think of any other words as she raises a shaky hand to her mouth. "What are you what do



you..." And then she turns in the room, looking around at everything – all of the things I picked out just for her. And I feel a thrill of joy radiate out from my heart as I watch my sister's eyes fill with tears.

"We'll get you all the baby stuff," I say quietly, "a little later. But we thought...for now, you might want to just settle in the two of you..." "It's too much," Roger says, sitting down hard on the bed as he continues to stare around the room, shaking his head. "Dominic – we can't -" "You have to," Sinclair says with a shrug. "Paperwork's all finished. It's out of my hands now – your problem." He smacks his hands together as if dusting them off, proving his point as he smiles at his brother. "Ella," Cora says, a little sob hitching in her throat as she steps close to me and lets me wrap my arms around her.

"I'm so happy to be able to give you a home, Cora," I whisper to her. "What we always wanted as kids. What we both have now."

At that, she really does burst into sobbing tears, and I laugh and hold her close, feeling a couple slip down my cheeks as well. I look over at Roger, feeling a little undone to see him wiping at his own eyes. "Thanks, Dominic," he says, and I grin at the fact that the brother we usually can't get to shut up has nothing left to say. "This was...this was so nice." "We love you, brother," Dominic says, patting his back and looking down at him. "You do have to name the kid after me, though." "No way!" Cora protests through her sobs, not letting that slide. "Middle name," Roger murmurs, smiling up at his brother. "For sure." And Dominic laughs, and so do I.

Our eyes meet and I don't even need to pass an emotion down the bond to know that he feels exactly the same as me: so grateful for our siblings, so excited for them, and so, so happy to be able to give them their first home in which to raise their child.

"Thanks for getting me out of that apartment," Cora murmurs into my neck, making me laugh. "It was so bad." "Which one?" I ask, grinning. "Yours or his?" "Both," she sighs. "Does this mean you two are moving into the palace?" Roger asks, finding his feet again and taking a steadying breath. "Yup," Sinclair replies, wrapping an arm around his brother's shoulders, "Right after breakfast." "Oh, so there really is food," Cora says, lifting her head and looking a little eagerly towards the door. "You two," I say, shaking my head and walking with her over to it. "You're going to have to learn how to feed yourselves. And the baby." "We'll play it by ear," she concedes, grinning, and then we all head down the steps for our final meal in our house.

Or, I think, smiling to myself, the first of many in Roger and Cora's.

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Accidental Surrogate Chapter 399-King and Queen Ella "I'm glad we did that," I say later that afternoon as Sinclair pulls our car around to the front entrance of the palace. "I couldn't stand to say goodbye to that house if it was to a stranger. Too many memories there." "I agree," Sinclair says, parking directly out front in what feels...well, feels too informal for the future King's first entrance to the palace, his new home. "Doesn't this place have like, a garage?" I murmur, looking into the back seat to check on little Rafe, who is happily chewing on the sleeve of his little baby hoodie and staring at himself in a mirror attached to his car seat. "I... think so..." Sinclair says, and I look up in surprise to see him grimacing at me a little. "I've only really been here for state occasions," he says, shrugging. "And the birth of our child," I point out.

"Well for that," he says, "wealsojust parked out front." "True true," I say, turning away to my door. "I guess we'll figure it all out. Yes, we will," he murmurs, getting out of the car and opening the back seat to lift out Rafe's carrier. While I wait for them to come around to my side, I stare up at the gorgeous palace in front of me. "I can't believe this is going to be my home," I murmur. "I can't believe I'm going to be a King," he sighs. I look up at him, studying the lines of his handsome face. "Yeah," I agree. "Me neither." Sinclair laughs and shakes his head down at me. "Well, I would hope thatyouwould try to chuff me up a little bit there." I laugh and take his arm, squeezing it. "Well, you know I think you cando it," I say, grinning, "and that I don't think anyone else could do it any better. I just," I consider it for a moment, shaking my head. "I don't know. I'm not going to be able to get used to people calling you King." "Will you be able to get used to people calling you Queen?" he asks, brow arched. I laugh up into his face at the ridiculousness of it. "Absolutely not," I reply. "They'll all just have to call me Ella, or I'll walk right past them without realizing that they're talking to me." "You don't do so poorly responding to Luna," he says, pulling his arm from my grip and wrapping it around my shoulder to pull me close. Yes, but that feels more real," I say quietly. "I...know what a Luna's supposed to do. I want to protect my pack, help them in all things." "I imagine Queen is much the same," he says softly. "You'll get used to it. And you'll be great." "Do I get a crown?" I ask grinning up at him, but then my face falls slack with shock when he slowly begins to nod.

"Wait, seriously?" I say, my eyes going wide. "I get acrown?" "It's technically not yours," he replies, laughing. "It belongs to the nation to be passed from Queen to Queen. But, for as long as you're alive and we're on the throne," he

grins widely at me, seeing the excitement on my face, “you get a crown.” “Well then let’s go!” I shout, bursting forward and heading up the steps.

“What the hell are we waiting for!” To my extreme disappointment, Sinclair does not take me immediately to the vault with the crown jewels and let me wear my tiara while I unpack all of our moving boxes. “Not until the official coronation, my ass,” I murmur angrily as I use a box cutter to cut the tape on probably my fortieth box and start to unload all of Rafe’s baby clothes. A few feet away from me in his little playpen, Rafe lets out a little squeal that I choose to interpret as support. “Thank you, Prince Rafe,” I call to him. “I agree. He’s being cruel.” “I am not,” Sinclair laughs, coming into the room with a little tray of food for our lunch. “I’m just following the. rules. It’s not really a Kingdom precisely anymore the jewels belong to everyone. It’s not right to wear them until the people have officially given them to us. And then,” he says, putting the tray down on the bed, “only on state occasions.” “Again,” I sigh, pausing to look up at him, “this is a rule that I will choose, in my wisdom as Queen, not to follow.” And then I send him a mental image down the bond of when, precisely, I plan to be wearing that crown. And just how good I’ll look wearing that crown, and only that crown. Sinclair blinks and then huffs a laugh, grinning at me. “Fine,” he says. “One exception can be made. One.” “One to start,” I say primly, turning back to my task at hand. “Come and eat,” he says, taking the fancy lids off of our plates of sandwiches, like we’re in some kind of hotel. I was pleased to hear that Sinclair, in starting to hire people to refill the palace with workers and get it back to fully functioning, hired a head chef.

Still, I don’t even know where the kitchens are and it feels strange already to be waited on like this. What am I going to do when I’m pregnant again? Just... wander the halls, starving, searching for the kitchens? “I’m not hungry yet,” I say to Sinclair, laying out Rafe’s clothes on the floor in neat piles and then disassembling the box. “I want to get us moved in.” I do take a moment, though, to look around the main bedchamber. “Remember the last time we were here?” I ask quietly, taking in the tall windows, the gorgeous floors. We’ve had much of the furniture replaced with that which suits our taste a bit better, but still...I’ll never forget the day we brought our baby into the world. “Vividly,” Sinclair murmurs, biting into his sandwich and watching me. “Are you sure you still want us to be our bedroom?”

“We have options.” “Yes,” I say with a little sigh, looking around. “I’m sure. It’s... fitting.” I smile at him. “This is a King’s bedroom for sure – and you are a King!” “Not yet, he says, shaking his head. “You keep saying that,” I reply, frowning at him. “Is there something wrong? Are you... doubting the fact that

the coronation will go through or something?" "No," he replies, cocking his head to the side. "I just...want everything to be right. Damon and his father..." he shakes his head, a little angry, "they took liberties with the privileges of this position that they shouldn't have. It wasn't right." "I know," I say quietly, watching my whole-hearted mate struggle with his new responsibilities. "But you'll be better." "I hope I can be," he sighs. And then he looks over at the baby. And I hope I can convince him to be as well, when his turn comes.

"Rafe?" I say, turning to my baby in surprise. But then my face bursts into a smile. "No, he'll be a great Prince! And a wonderful King!" And then I laugh, crawling over to his little playpen and peeking over the edge, grinning at my little boy. "How could he not be, he's so sweet!" Sinclair smiles at me but then shrugs. "Every tyrant was once a well-loved little baby whose mother thought they were too cute to do anything wrong." Yes," I sigh, standing and reaching down to pick up my baby and carry him over to his poor worried father. "But we'll raise him right." I kiss my baby on his head, sending a little love down the bond to him that makes him smile and wiggle with happiness. "We'll do our very best, Rafe," Sinclair says to our boy, smiling at him. "We can promise you that." "So," I say, after a moment as I raise my baby to my shoulder and hold him close. "What's next for us? We're in the palace. We're awaiting some kind of coronation. What do we have to...do?" "Well," my mate says, looking up at me with serious eyes. "I've got a bunch of politics and meetings to attend, as well as a palace and a nation to get going. But you...well, Ella, I want you to do what you please." "What do you mean?" I ask, confused. "I don't just want to sit around relaxing and watching movies all day – I had enough of that during bed rest, it was terrible. I want to help you -" "I know," he says, laughing and reaching for my hand, which I give him. "But I don't want to...give you tasks, or tell me how to help me. I want you to pick your own projects. Your instincts are excellent, Ella. I have my own ideas about how to help the people of this nation, both human and wolf alike. But I know you do too." I bite my lip. "I'm not sure I do just. yet." Honestly, it probably makes me a bad Queen but...I haven't given it as much thought as I should. "Well, you will," he says, nodding to me. "And when you do, I want you to follow them. But in the meantime, if you'd like a suggestion..." I nod eagerly, excited for a project and curious about what he has in mind. "What do you think about planning a wedding? A big one, very public." I wrinkle my nose at him, confused. Then I lean forward. "Sinclair," I say, shaking my head a little. "We already did that. I mean I know a mating ceremony is a little different but we –" "No," he says, laughing up at me, and I can't help but smile down into my mate's handsome face. Sometimes he's still so beautiful when he laughs that it takes my breath away. "I'm not talking about us." "Then who?" I ask.

“Roger and Cora,” he says quietly. “I think it could be good for the nation to see a wolf marry a human. Even if she’s ...notpreciselyas human as we thought she was. What do you think?” And a huge smile breaks out on my face that, by his laugh, tells himpreciselywhat I think.

“I love it,” I whisper. And then I squeal in excitement, spinning fast in a circle and laughing with joy. “A wedding! A wedding for Roger and Cora!” I absolutely cannot wait.

Accidental Surrogate Chapter 400-Bringing Aid Ella Our first night in the palace is so strange for me. My two boys are sleeping soundly on either side of me – Sinclair sprawled out over our supersized bed (it’s much bigger than a King – I don’t even know if they have a name for it anymore; we had to make a custom order) and Rafe’s bassinet is pulled up close on my other side. I look first at my mate and then at my little baby, smiling at each of them, marveling at how much they already resemble each other with their dark hair and their wide-set eyes, each framed with dark lashes.

My smile deepens as I look between them. I mean, Sinclair is of course lacking Rafe’s pudgy cheeks, but the resemblance is still uncanny. It’s very, veryclear who this baby’s daddy is.

“Rude of you, little baby,” I whisper, rolling over on my side and peeking into the bassinet, “to not bother looking like me at all.” He sighs a little in his sleep and wiggles, getting more comfortable. It’s so cute that I think my heart might burst at the sight of it. But the sight of my super-cute little baby can only do so much to distract me from all of the thoughts racing through my mind right now. I roll onto my back and stare at the distant ceiling, turning them over one-by-one.

Half of them pertain to the wedding, which I really am excited about. And I do think it’s a good idea – half of the trouble of bringing this nation together is suggesting to humans and wolves alike that this nation respects both kinds of persons – and that we’re allequal. A marriage between them – especially as publicized as Sinclair thinks it should be will go far with both populations in suggesting that the Royal family, at least, truly embraces this idea.

I wrinkle my nose and laugh a little at the thought of myself as part of aroyal family- I’m nowhere near fancy enough for such a title – but then I sigh again, distracted.

Because Sinclair's other point is still valid – I know, in my heart, that I want to help our citizens, help everyone. And I have this incredible healing power that I could use in our nation's hospitals to actually physically help people... But is that what I really want to do? Is that the best use of my gifts? Then, quite suddenly, I remember someone who might be able to help. As quietly as I can, I turn over and slide open the drawer by my bedside table, pulling out the cellphone that I haven't had for weeks since we've been away in the bunker. I flick it on and then quickly pull up a familiar name in my contacts and send off a text:

Isabel! I've been a bad friend – but we're back now, from where we had to go.

Do you have a minute tomorrow? To talk?

Biting my lip – because I really do feel bad about neglecting my friendship, especially after I asked her to stay here instead of going home – I send off my message and hope that my friend can forgive me.

But, considering how good and kind she is if not a bit sharp-edged at times, I think, smiling – I think, and hope, that she'll forgive me.

Then, feeling a little better at having gotten started on a plan, I finally drift off to sleep.

When Sinclair's alarm rings the next morning, he groans as he rolls over to turn it off, and then he flops back in his spot and reaches out an arm for me. But he opens his eyes in surprise when his hand meets...nothing. Because as soon as I heard the alarm, I gasped and rolled away, reaching for my phone, desperate to see if Isabel replied. Yesss," I whisper, excited to see that I have a message waiting. "What?" Sinclair asks, groggy. "What's happening?" "Nothing," I murmur, quickly flicking my messages open. Go back to sleep." Ignoring him, I eagerly click open Isabel's reply.

Ella! Where the hell have you been!? We've all been so worried! Please come and see me – I want to hug you myself and assure myself that you're all right.

I'm at the Refugee Center – come by any time after 8, someone will lead you to me.

I eagerly start to type out my reply but, before I get far, I hear a snarl behind me and feel a gigantic arm wrap tight around my waist. I gasp and then shriek



in shock as Sinclair pulls me, laughing, across the bed to settle tightly against his chest.

“What the hell is this,” he growls in my ear, pretending to be angry.” Mymate?

Neglecting me in the morning?” “Ohh, poor big scary Alpha,” I tease, turning in his arms so that my stomach is pressed against his, pouting mockingly up into his face. “Did you need your morning kiss and snuggle, or else you can’t start your day?” “Damn right I can’t,” he growls, baring his teeth at me – an act that would probably make some men quail but which only makes me laugh.” We’re going to have to introduce some discipline in this house – you have duties, little Queen -” “Ohhhh, little Queen,” I say, pressing myself tighter against him and wrapping my arms around his neck so that my whole body is flush against his.

“I like this new nickname. Very elegant.” “Do you,” he murmurs, dropping his head to drag kisses along my neck and down across his shoulder, the tickly stubble of his beard making me shiver. “I could think of a few other things to call you.” “Oh really,” I sigh,” rolling one shoulder back so that Sinclair can continue his path down across my collar bone and lower, until his lips press against the skin just above my breasts. “Like what?” “Bad girl,” he offers, glaring up at me.

“For snatching up your phone first thing in the morning. Making me jealous of whoever it is you’re talking to.” And then he drops his gaze, continuing his path.

I shudder a little at the feel of his lips against my skin, burying my fingers in his silky black hair and letting my head tilt back a little at the pleasure of it.

“No reason to be jealous,” I murmur. “It’s just Isabel. I’m going to visit her at the Refugee Center today.” “What?” he asks, snapping his head up, all the play gone from his voice. I go still, frowning at him, wondering what went wrong.

What is it?” “You’re going to the Refugee Center?” I turn my head to the side. “Is that...bad?” “It’s very dangerous, Ella,” Sinclair says, staring hard at me. “Those people are desperate – they will do anything to better their situations, they could seek to take advantage of you -” “Baby,” I murmur, putting a hand on his cheek and frowning deeper while I search his face. “That’s precisely why I should go. They need help – I can help them -” He sighs and hangs his head for a moment, thinking it through. I wait, trying to be patient but unable to

help feeling a little frustrated. Just yesterday he told me to find my own path, and today he's trying to tell me that my chosen path is too dangerous?

"I just...want you to be safe," he says, lifting his head and looking me in the eyes. My frustration flees instantly because I understand – I really do." We'll be safe," I whisper, running a hand over the stubble of his cheek. "Isabel goes every day – and she wouldn't put me in a situation if she thought that I -" "Wait, we?" Sinclair says, sitting up fully now and looking at me sternly. "Who is 'we'?" "Rafe and I," I say, sitting up on my elbows and looking up at my gigantic mate towering above me.

He laughs, derisive, and looks away. "You aren't bringing the baby." away.

I laugh right back. "Just try to stop me!"