

## ACCIDENTAL SURROGATE FOR ALPHA

Accidental Surrogate Chapter 406-Pillow plans Ella I sigh, closing my eyes for a second. “I forgot all about the Atalaxians,” I murmur.

“You’ve had a long day,” Sinclair replies, even though that’s not really an excuse. Not for a Queen, who needs to balance it all. I take a moment to collect my thoughts before opening my eyes and looking at him again.

“What I want,” I say quietly, “is a big team to go solve a lot of the overarching problems with the refugees. Doctors, lawyers, social workers anyone who can help us start to patch the big problems there, to get these camps functioning not as a holding space but as a system that helps people get back to their lives, or start new ones.” I think more on his question of how long I think this will take. “But once that’s done...” I shrug a little, “I won’t need such a big team, once that’s accomplished.

But I still want systems in place that help people, and I want to run them. Would that be...possible?” “I think it’s very possible,” Sinclair says seriously, reaching out a hand to stroke my hair. “And I think it’s very good of you to want to do it. When do you want to start?” “Tomorrow,” I say, my eyes going wide. “I need to go to the Human Camp – I need to see if anyone there needs to be healed immediately, especially the children – ” Sinclair laughs, shaking his head at me. I make a little squeak of protest at his wanting to delay me, but he shakes his head, letting me know that I’m misinterpreting him. “I’ll make sure you have the bodyguards to do it, first thing in the morning. The lawyers and social workers – they’ll take a bit longer. Is that all right?” “Yes!” I breathe, suddenly incredibly excited. And then my eyes fill with tears again as I smile at my mate, as I scooch closer across the gigantic bed until our baby is frankly squeezed between us, wanting to be close to my mate and our child at the same time. ” Thank you, Dominic.” “Of course, Ella,” he says, kissing me on the forehead. We stay like that for a long moment, passing love between our bond in a steady loop, each of us connecting with Rafe so that he feels it too. He gives us a contented little burble in reply.

“Although Ella,” Sinclair murmurs, making me look up at him.

“What?” I ask, curious and a little worried. “This time?” he says, leaning in to hold my gaze, making sure he hears me. “You’re taking your phone.” And I laugh, nodding and tucking my head under his chin, perfectly happy and

excited about our new plans. Okay, love," I sigh, content. "I'll take my phone. I promise." Cora I'm completely beat that evening as I unlock the door to our little house – but even if I'm almost too exhausted to feel my own feet beneath me, I can't help but smile as my key twists in the lock. My key, I think, grinning. My lock. My house!

As I push the door open and look around, I still can't quite believe it – that Ella and Sinclair gave us this house, that it's really ours. At first it felt a lot like Roger and I were just living here, that it was just a loaner or something.

But as every day passes, and we feel more and more relaxed here....

Well. It starts to settle in. That this is my home, with my mate.

And I smile down at my belly, running a hand over it even though I'm not showing at all. Because in a couple of months, we're going to bring a little baby home here. And he's going to grow up calling this place home.

And it's such a rich, wonderful anticipation that...well, I lose my breath a bit, I'm so happy. But I inhale deeply and look up when I hear my mate at the top of the stairs.

"Hey," Roger says, smiling widely and starting to hurry down them, eager to be at my side. He reaches me almost in an instant, pushing the door shut behind me in the same moment that he wraps an arm around my waist and kisses me.

And I wrap my arms around his neck and kiss him back, smiling as I do so – because this, too, feels a little unreal, especially after the horrible things that I saw today. Roger, mine, my mate – waiting for me, in our house.

How the hell did I get so lucky?

"Where you been, gorgeous?" Roger murmurs, moving his face back from mine just an inch, his arms still wrapped around my waist. "I was surprised you weren't home when I got here." "I know," I sigh, shaking my head a little. "It was...a crazier day than I thought it would be." "Really," he says, surprised. "What happened?" And then he lets me go, moving to the door to twist the lock and then taking my hand, leading me into the kitchen where I'm sure that there's some kind of takeout waiting for me.

"We went to the refugee camp, the one with the wolves," I tell him, smiling with pleasure as my suspicions are confirmed. Roger opens the fridge and pulls out some packages of my favorite Thai noodles. He starts to put them into a bowl for me as I sit down at the table and continue. "There were so many children there who needed help. Ella healed the ones who needed it most – but it was... it was a lot." "I'm surprised to hear that," Roger replies, bringing me my food along with a big glass of cold water. "Well – or maybe not to hear it. But I'm surprised that I didn't know that it was so bad that so many children were suffering. That seems like the sort of thing that Sinclair would be on top of." "We've been gone for long time, and we've been distracted," I say, starting to slurp up the noodles eagerly, so hungry that I'm unable to help myself from being messy. But in my heart, I know Roger couldn't care less, so I allow myself to dig in and indulge. "I guess Sinclair didn't have all of his information systems in place to give him all the details." "Are you guys going back?" Roger asks, curious, and I hear a little hesitation in his voice.

"Yes," I reply, continuing to eat as I look up at him. "Tomorrow, if we can. But to the human camps. There's just... so much to do. So many people who need immediate help – and Ella really can provide that immediate care that other doctors can't. And she needs me," I say, giving a little shrug, "or else she'll have an emotional breakdown over each and every kid." I smirk, remembering how she was today. "And try to adopt them." Roger laughs at this, shaking his head a little, because he knows Ella's personality well enough by this point to understand exactly what I mean. But then he quietly looks at the floor, raising my suspicions.

"What?" I ask, putting my fork down and waiting. Because I know there's something he's not saying. Roger just sighs and looks up at me. "Can't you guess?" "You're worried," I reply, shaking my head a little. "That it's too dangerous." "Knew you were clever," he says with a cheeky wink. I open my mouth to protest but Roger just raises a hand, asking me to wait. And, obliging my dear mate, I do. After a moment he starts again.

"I trust you, Cora," he says, taking a deep breath. "But you are pregnant. And even beyond the baby, you're aware that I'm..." he shrugs and I smile already, anticipating the joke, "mildly fond of you." I laugh aloud and he grins at me, holding my gaze. "Cora, after everything that we've been through, you know it would kill me if anything happened to you, right? So, would you mind if I asked Sinclair to ensure that you're going to these camps with a heavy guard?" I open my mouth to agree instantly, but then I hesitate.

"What?" Roger asks, encouraging me to speak.

"I don't mind the guards," I say honestly, "but we're going to the human camp.

And...I wonder if it's good for us to show up with like, twenty wolves to help a group of people who patently distrust wolves." "A good point," he says, nodding and looking off into the distance a little. "I'll bring it up with Sinclair. But do you mind, overall?" he asks, looking back at me again, "the idea of an increased guard?" "I do not," I say, smiling at him and giving a little shrug. "Though I imagine Sinclair's already got it planned." "That's what's nice about having an Alpha brother," Roger says, laughing a little.

"He solves your problems before you ever even know they existed." "He also gives you houses," I point out, reaching for my glass of water and taking a big gulp.

"Yeah..." Roger says, hesitating and rubbing the back of his neck, looking down at the floor.

"What?" I ask, picking up on a hesitation in Roger's voice that's new to me. I stand up, finished with my noodles and go to stand next to my mate at his place leaning against the granite countertop. "What's wrong?" "Are you ready to get pissed off?" he asks, looking up at me through his eyelashes a bit.

I cross my arms, saying nothing, just waiting for my mate to continue.

Accidental Surrogate Chapter 407-Meet Me There Cora Roger's silent for a long time, smirking at me, making me answer.

"I make no promises," I reply after a long moment, shaking my hair back in a lofty way that makes him laugh. "But seriously, what is it?" "Well," Roger sighs, letting his shoulders drop and looking at me squarely now that some of the tension is gone. "Sinclair wants to give us more than a house now. He also wants to give us...a wedding." My jaw drops a little. "A wedding?" I ask, baffled. "But we're...we're wolves," I say, wrinkling my nose. "Or at least – mostly wolf," I say, glancing down at my belly where my little hybrid baby is growing.

"Yeah, he wants it to be a wedding and a mating ceremony at once – a symbolic uniting of the wolf and human worlds. Because I'm a wolf," he says, pointing to himself, "and you're a human," he continues, pointing to me. "Or at least, sort of." I still shake my head, confused.

"And he wants it to be on TV," he says, grimacing as he drops the final bomb, "like a royal wedding, for the entire world to see." And, just as Roger predicted, I immediately get very, very pissed off.

"This is such bullshit," I murmur, pulling my cell phone out of my back pocket and immediately starting to text Ella to tell her precisely what I think of this plan.

"Wait," Roger says, laughing a little and reaching for the phone, "just give it a minute -" "Are you seriously on board with this?" I snap, looking up at him, my anger transferring immediately from my sister to my mate. "After I've told you, like a thousand times, that I want our mating ceremony – whatever it is 1 to be special, and meaningful? I mean, if we were just going to do it any old way we would have done it by now "Cora," Roger says, drawing my attention away from my tirade and covering my phone with his hand, stepping close to me, "I am on board with whatever it is you want, all right? So, let's put the phone and the rage away for a few minutes and just talk about this. But no one is going to force you to do anything you don't want to, okay?" I take a deep breath then, turning towards my mate and putting my phone on the counter, sliding it away from me. "Okay," I agree, nodding but looking down at the floor.

"What's up," he murmurs, putting his hands on my hips and pulling me close, resting his forehead against mine. "Why did that make you so angry? It was just an idea." "Because," I sigh, sorting through my emotions as best I can. "Because what we have, Roger," I continue, putting my hands on his chest, "it's so important to me.

It's – it's the best thing I've got, and so much more than I ever thought I wanted, or could ever have." Roger makes a soft, sweet noise of understanding then, drawing me closer and wrapping his arms around me.

"And it's not that I don't want to help Ella," I say, my voice slightly muffled against his shoulder, "and like...the nation, or whatever. I just...this is important to me. I want it to be right, just this one thing." "All right," Roger murmurs, his arms wrapping me up even tighter, making me smile. "I understand, and I agree. It's a no for us." "I'll tell her, okay?" I whisper, and I feel him nod his head. And then, sighing with relief that I have him on my side and that I just have him at all – I let my body relax against Roger's and breathe in his warm, rich, comforting scent, letting it wrap all around me.

"So," he says after a few long moments of relaxing against each other, "can I just give you the mark now?" "What!" I shriek, going tense in surprise.

"I mean, if we're not going to do it publicly- why wait -" I pull back from Roger, staring up at him, trying to ascertain whether or not he's serious. But the moment I see the big wicked grin on his face I scowl and smack him on the chest, knowing that he's teasing me. "No, Roger," I growl. "I still want it to be right! I'm not going to just let you bite my neck when we're hanging out in the kitchen and I still have noodle-breath!" "I like noodles," he murmurs, stepping close and lifting a hand to slide his fingers under my shirt to the place where my neck meets my shoulder, where he intends to mark me. "And you smell amazing right now –" I laugh, shoving him away. "I smell like dirt and field hospital," I reply, shaking my head and stepping away. You're just listening to your wolf too much- "Well he won't shut up Roger groans, tilting his head back even as he laughs.

"Seriously, Cora, it's bite her now, do it! On a constant refrain, whenever you're around!" My own wolf perks up inside of me, raising her snout smugly to the sky and giving a little howl of triumph. I want it too, she says, giving a wolfish little grin, but I know how to contain myself.

"Well, my wolf," I say smugly, crossing my arms over my chest, "says your wolf is being an impatient brat." "Yes," Roger growls, grabbing me by the waist again and pulling me close, obviously. Like man, like wolf. This is implied." "Well," I reply, laughing and smiling up at my handsome mate, my eyes sparkling. "Your wolf had better take some lessons from mine. Because he still has some waiting to do." "I'd like to meet this wolf of yours," Roger murmurs, kissing me swiftly and then nudging me with his nose. "She sounds judgmental. And cruel. Like someone else I know." "Excuse you," I growl, giving him a little shove on his chest that doesn't move him at all. "She is beautiful and refined and self-contained." "Well, I want to see this for myself," he says, giving a happy sigh. "Do you want to show me?" "How?" I ask, suddenly eager. Because if there is a way – then yes, I absolutely want to do that. I mean, I know that Roger can sense my wolf- but to really see her, to meet her, this part of me that I have to keep inside because I'm half human? What does he have in mind?

"I've been thinking," he says, cocking his head to the side, "about this little thing they call the dream state. Did Ella ever tell you about it?" "Yes," she says, my eyes going wide. "Yes, she did!" Unfortunately, we don't get to the dream state for a long time because we're too excited about it to actually sleep. So we go through our evening routine as best we can, with both of us showering, and then relaxing quietly in the bedroom, and then laying in bed reading boring books until we're drowsy enough to actually drift off.

I glance over at Roger pretty much every two minutes or so to see how he's doing, and then suddenly between one glance and the next – I see that he's breathing deeply, with his eyes shut and his mouth slightly open.

Eager, but feeling my body getting ready to shut down, I put my book away and switch off the light, leaning close to Roger to press a kiss to his cheek before I put my head on my pillow. Then, after reaching out to place a hand on his slowly-rising chest, I close my own eyes.

As instructed, I keep myself focused on the goal: to open my mind enough to allow Roger to come in, to send him a little invitation down my mating bond.

And as I feel myself begin to drift off, I do my very best. Come with me, Roger, I say internally, in half of my own voice, half my wolf's. Meet me there.

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Accidental Surrogate Chapter 408-At the Beach Cora When I blink my eyes open, I gasp a little at the gorgeous sight before me.

Ocean stretches as far as the eye can see in front of me and there, at the horizon, just the tiniest sliver of a sun can be seen, finally taking its own rest below the horizon.

I look to my left and right and chills stumble down my spine at the beautiful beach that stretches out in each direction – perfect white sand against which the surf lightly crashes, lined with palm trees and scrubby forest with no human buildings in sight.

All of this beautiful, untouched nature makes the super plush beach day bed that I'm sitting on even more incongruous, though, and I laugh a little as I look down it. But my laughter fades as I admire my flowing white dress, and the crisp white sheets, and the amazing warm breeze that brushes against my skin. The bed has four posts from which gauzy fabric flies, and candles are scattered around all of it.

It's so incredibly beautiful that I lose my breath. And I lose it again when I see the handsome man walking across the beach towards me.

"Hey, gorgeous," he says, grinning at me with his hands in his pockets. "Looks like it worked." Laughing in wonder now, I shake my head at my mate. "I thought – I thought it was supposed to be a forest!" Roger shrugs, looking

around at the beautiful landscape, the evening breeze lifting his hair. "That's Ella's dream state. I guess this is yours." Then he turns to me, the corner of his mouth lifted into a little smile. "Thanks for letting me in." "Come sit!" I say, scooting over to make room. My mate obliges me, seating himself on the bed. I look him over, laughing. "Why are you dressed in linen pants?" I ask, wrinkling my nose.

"You dressed me like this!" he protests, waving a hand at himself. "I have no control!" "I did not," I laugh, shaking my head. "You look like you're going to Margaritaville to listen to some Jimmy Buffet." Roger glares at me a little and then closes his eyes, concentrating. Between one blink and the next, his clothing changes so that he's now in a more familiar black pants and white button-down shirt, though it's not as crisp as something he might wear with a suit. Definitely more beach casual.

"Oh," he murmurs, looking down at himself. "I guess it was me." "We could have just taken it off," I say with a shrug, scooting closer and reaching out to touch him, to run my hand over his shoulder and his arm. To my surprise, he feels completely corporeal exactly as he does in the real world.

"Can you feel that?" I ask.

"I can," he confirms, a little pleasant shudder passing through his body. Then he takes my chin in one hand and leans in to kiss me, just a soft touch of his lips on mine. "Can you feel that?" "Mmhmm," I say, leaning back and grinning widely.

"This is so cool." Roger says, flopping back onto the bed and staring up into the sky with a wide smile on his face." Now we can hang out all the time – all day and all night." "Nah," I say, leaning back as well and putting my head on his shoulder. " Sometimes I will lock you in dream jail when you piss me off. And then I will come here, and have dream margaritas all by myself." "Cruel," he growls, snapping his teeth at me and making me laugh. "Just as I said." "Oh yeah!" I say eagerly, sitting up suddenly and looking all around as I remember where all of this started. "Where's my wolf?!" "I don't know," Roger says, sitting up next to me and likewise looking around.

"Why don't you know?" I ask, turning to him, confused. "Haven't you done this before?" "No, Cora," he says, rolling his eyes at me playfully. "You're my first mate which is kind of required for the exercise. I have never done this before either.

Everything I know about this comes second-hand from Dominic.” “Oh!” I say, and then I start to laugh. He sits up and laughs with me, even though he doesn’t know what’s funny.

“What,” he murmurs, taking my face in his hands like he can’t resist and kissing me again between words, ” what’s so funny?” “It’s just so cute,” I whisper, still giggling. “Usually I feel like the naïve one with all of this wolf and shifter stuff! But finally we’re on the same playing field! I get to pop your dream cherry!” Roger laughs along with me, nodding and kissing me and pulling me backwards on the bed with him. ” Anytime you want, Cora,” he murmurs against my mouth as his breathing starts to get heavier. “You’re the boss in your own dream – I’m ready when you are.” “Really,” I murmur, rolling him backwards a bit so that I can straddle his hips, placing a knee on either side of him and laying my stomach flat against his. And then I run my hands through his hair, bringing my mouth back to his. “Anytime I want?” But before he can answer me, simultaneously, Roger and I both gasp, our eyes going wide. “Oh my god,” I say, freezing on top of my mate, staring into his face.

“Did you,” he whispers, not even daring to blink, “did you feel that too?” And I sit up in a flash, my hands flying to my stomach as I look down at it.

Because that that was from the baby And then, quite suddenly and totally without warning- It comes again.

A single, steady pulse of...happy.

“Oh...oh my god,” I murmur, tears suddenly springing to my eyes. “Seriously, Cora,” Roger says, his voice shaking, and I turn my eyes to his face as he works to prop himself up on his elbows, “am I imagining this?” “No,” I say, shaking my head vehemently and laughing a little desperate laugh, “I mean unless we’re both imagining the same thing. Do you do you think it’s the dream?” “Or,” he says, reaching out to touch a tentative hand to my stomach, “is our son actually...” “...happy,” I finish for him.

But we get our answer the moment Roger’s palm presses flat against my stomach, because it comes again.

Happy...happy... And then I really do burst into tears, burying my face in my hands. Roger sits up, wrapping his arms around me, and I feel his shoulders shaking a little with his own tears.

Because our little boy – he's finally big enough, now, to not just be a little bundle of cells in my body – but instead a little person in there, feeling his own very real little feelings, big enough finally to start to pass them to us through the bond – And we've finally got the first one. And it absolutely shatters my heart into pieces to know that the first thing he's telling us is that he's happy.

"Oh my god," Roger says, still crying as he takes my face in his hands and starts to kiss me again, passing his own feelings along the bond to me, and along to the baby through their own bond, which is attached to mine. Roger sends the baby joy, and happiness, and pride, and love – And I send it all too – But then I worry that we're overwhelming the baby, so I stop – "Don't stop," Roger says, his lips still against mine, "let him feel it." So I don't I pass my baby all the love 1 in my heart, and my excitement to meet him, and what a treasure he is to me already – And the baby starts to pass it all back to us faster now – Happy, happy, happy.

And Roger and I cry harder, laughing with each other, holding each other tight.

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Accidental Surrogate Chapter 409-Touch Just the Faintest Cora After a few minutes of this – or maybe an hour, I honestly don't know how time works here – the baby's happiness fades away and then into silence. But not in a bad way – more like he just... "He fell asleep," Roger murmurs, laughing a little and falling back on the bed, taking me with him since his arms are still wrapped around me.

"It's too early for the baby to sleep..." I murmur, confused. "That happens around like, the seventh month -" "All right, Dr. Cora," Roger mutters, and I can hear him rolling his eyes, even though I can't see it, which makes me laugh. "Considering that we're hanging out on a magical dream beach, passing our emotions down a magical bond with our unborn child, I don't really think that your medical knowledge is coming into play here -" "Oh shut up," I murmur, slapping his chest and sighing with contentment. Roger laughs and takes a deep breath of my scent.

"That was amazing," he whispers. I'll never forget that as long as I live." "Do you think we just felt it because we're here?" I ask, still likewise thrilled. "Or, will we feel it when we're awake too?" "I don't know," Roger replies. "But maybe something about being in the dream amplified it. I guess we'll find out." "Yeah," I say, happy, content. Because as much as I want to feel it all the

time, I am also content to wait, to experience all parts of this pregnancy in their own time. "I guess we will." And I close my eyes and relax against my mate, little shivers passing through me as he traces his fingers idly over the skin of my back, both of us still marveling in the magic of that incredible first connection with the baby.

But suddenly, something changes. And I open my eyes to see my wolf standing there on the beach, just a short distance away.

"Roger," I say softly, starting to sit up. He opens his eyes and looks where I'm looking, likewise catching sight of my wolf in the sand, staring at us, her tongue hanging happily from her mouth.

"Oh," he says, likewise sitting up and holding me close against him. "Wow, Cora...she's beautiful." But I don't reply as I look at my wolf, at all of the thousand shades of brown that run through her fur, from tawny to chestnut. Because I know that she's not here to be admired – though she's enjoying that too.

Come with me, she says – and I know, instinctually, that Roger hears her as well. I have something to show you.

We both eagerly get to our feet as we look at each other, laughing. Because neither of us feel an ounce of fear, even though this is completely bizarre. When we're standing, my wolf dances in an eager circle and then trots away from us along the beach.

Roger takes my hand and we follow, walking quickly, both dying to see what she's leading us towards.

Before we get far, another shadow detaches itself from the forest and comes bounding towards us. Roger laughs as his wolf dashes over to us and eagerly presses his head to Roger's chest, nuzzling against him.

"This is so cool," Roger murmurs, shooting me a grin before his wolf comes to press his snout into my own hands.

Hello, Roger's gigantic wolf says as I marvel at his size, at the way he nearly comes up to my shoulder and can completely encircle me when he winds himself around my body, as he does now. You are mine. You should let him bite you!

I laugh, cooing to the wolf “soon, soon,” and running my hands through his warm fur. Roger laughs as well and puts his arm around my shoulder when his wolf dashes off towards mine.

“Told you he was annoying,” Roger murmurs.

“He’s perfect,” I reply, sighing and turning my face up to his for a kiss. But before our lips can meet, my wolf gives another little yip, calling us forward. Confused, but pleased, Roger and I start out again.

“I have no idea what is happening,” Roger says, grinning.

“I think it’s gonna be good,” I say, peering after my wolf. “She’s really excited.” We both quicken our steps when my wolf stops beside a little patch of green bushes and again turns in her eager circle. Her prancing gets even more eager as we get closer.

Come come, she says, her tongue lolling as Roger’s wolf stands proudly at her shoulder. We want to show him to you.

And then a moan tumbles from my mouth as I fall to my knees in front of the little bundle of fur sleeping there on the beach in front of me, nestled lovingly into a little soft bed of leaves. Roger almost collapses next to me, his hands hitting the sand hard – I think saving him from falling flat on his face in shock.

“Oh,” I say, my voice trembling and my entire body shaking as I reach out towards the incredibly perfect, incredibly tiny little wolf pup sleeping in front of us. “Oh, you...” And as I reach my fingers out, I barely, just barely feel the brush of fur against them – though not completely, as if he’s still half out of the dream – or more than half – You can’t touch him yet, my wolf says, her voice full of love and pride. He is not big enough. But soon.

Roger moans wordlessly as he reaches out too, to try to touch the tiny infant pup, and I feel his own shock and disappointment and joy and wonder as he, too, just barely feels the ghost of fur against his fingertips.

Because even if we haven’t met our baby yet this...this is his wolf, his soul. And he’s so, so beautiful... Tears are slipping down my cheeks again as I lay down next to the pup, as I study every inch of him, and feel Roger curling up next to me to do the same.

“He looks like you,” I say through my tears.

"How can he look like me," Roger says, his own voice hitching with emotion, "he's a...a wolf..." "His wolf looks like your wolf, you idiot," I murmur, laughing and reaching out a single finger again to trace the line of my son's wolf's snout, which I can barely feel. His little nose is still pink with his youth, not even turning black like it will when he's older and his little ears are now just 1 triangles pinned flat against his skull – But all over he's fuzzy, and he's warm, and his little ribs are rising with his breath, and his little tiny paws are the cutest things I've ever seen – He is a good pup, I hear Roger's wolf tell us, proud. I like him.

We both laugh at that – at the simple, flat way Roger's wolf states things – and I glance over my shoulder to see my own wolf prancing and pressing herself close to Roger's wolf, raising her snout to tap her nose against his, agreeing with the sentiment.

"I like him too," I say, resting my head down so that my nose is inches from the baby's.

"Yeah," Roger says, curling up behind me and peering over at me so that he, too, can stare at the pup as much as he wants. "We'll keep this one, for sure." I laugh at my mate at his weird, dry sense of humor that always keeps me guessing and then, to my grief, the world slowly starts to fade as the dream brings itself to an end.

"Oh no," I cry, suddenly frantic, wanting to stay here forever – for days, for weeks if we can to watch him grow maybe see him open his eyes – "It's all right," Roger murmurs in my ear, pressing a kiss to my cheek. "We'll be back." "That's right, little baby," I say, turning back to my son, who sleeps peacefully on.

"We'll be back. We'll see you here soon." "We love you so much," Roger murmurs.

And then his voice fades, and the vision fades, and all that is left is rest.

Accidental Surrogate Chapter 410-Assembling the Team Cora When I wake up the next morning the dawn sun is already streaming through the windows, and I am absolutely – hands down – the happiest I've ever been.

I'm curled up against my mate's side, my hand still on his chest where I placed it when I fell asleep, and when I look up into his face? I see him already smiling down at me.

My mouth bursts into a smile.

"Well," he says, turning fully towards me now and nudging my nose with his.

"That was an incredible dream, wasn't it?" "Do you think it was real?" I whisper, desperately, desperately hoping that it was.

"I do," he replies, nodding. "I don't think...well, the things that you made up the beach, the landscape...they were all pretty static, no?" I gasp a little, offended – "It was not static! It was intricate and there was a breeze I could smell the salt -" "No, Cora," he says, laughing, "I mean like, unchanging. The things that changed – you, me, the feeling the baby passed to us, and the wolves? Those all seemed very real." "Yeah," I say, relaxing again and snuggling close, tucking my head beneath Roger's chin. "I think it was real too." "He's a really cute pup," Roger murmurs, sleepily kissing my hair. "Way cuter than Rafe." "I know, right?" I mumble, yawning. But we don't have to tell Ella and Dominic that." "No way," he replies. "No need to hurt their feelings. They'll find out soon enough. We're quiet for a moment before I ask my next question. "Did that go... how you thought it would?" I ask, hesitant.

"No," Roger says instantly, laughing. "Honestly, Cora, I thought we were going to have way more sex -" And then I burst into laughter too, because that's what I had expected as well. I don't know what Sinclair told his brother, but from everything Ella has said? It sounds like the dream state has been a place for them to really explore their relationship in a very physical way – after all, they had sex there first, before they ever did with their real bodies.

And while I can certainly see Roger and I using the dream state for that kind of exploration in the future? A part of me is really, really glad that mine and Roger's experience brought us closer in a different way.

Because right now, I feel so much more like a family than I did before we went to sleep. And it's not that we weren't a family before – but now that we've... we've felt him? Met him, just a little bit?

The baby is so real to me now, so vividly himself, already, that I can't help but think of him as my son, and me as his mom, and Roger as his dad, and us – all of us – as a very real family.

"I know," Roger says, placing a finger under my chin and turning my face up to his. "I feel exactly the same way." I laugh then, curious. "Wait, how do you know what I'm feeling?" "You're passing it down the bond," he murmurs. "Are

you not trying to?" "Not intentionally," I say. "But...I was thinking about you. And the baby. So maybe it just...went." He nods, agreeing, understanding.

Then, curious, I reach out and take Roger's hand, giving it a little squeeze and passing a curious little pulse down our mating bond to him, seeing if I can do it intentionally. I'm still not used to this wolf stuff, and I don't know how good I am at it. "Did you feel that?" I ask.

"I did," he murmurs, pleased. "You're curious." "Yes," I reply, smiling happily. And then I close my eyes and concentrate, still keeping one touch on the bond between me and Roger but also giving a little tap on the bond that I now feel so much more powerfully between me and the baby than I did yesterday. I give it just a little nudge.

And to my shocked pleasure, the baby responds, nudging us back.

My eyes flash open and before I can even ask, I see on Roger's thrilled face that he felt it too.

And then I laugh, and look down at myself, and send another little nudge, this time with a question attached.

...Happy? I ask.

It takes a moment, but then the reply comes and I feel it ring through me like a bell. Happy! My boy sends back, and I laugh, and feel myself start to cry again.

Happy, happy.

And then he curls away again, content.

"He's happy," Roger says, choked up, taking my face in his hands and kissing me again. "And I don't think I've ever once been happier, not in my whole life." "Same," I reply, laughing at how stupid it sounds, to say it so simply like that.

"Roger, I feel exactly the same." Ella When the car turns into Cora's driveway, she's already standing outside her door with a to-go mug of tea in her hands, a big smile on her face. Rafe gives a little squeal of anticipation when the car stops and Cora starts to walk towards it.

I look down at my baby, strapped into his car seat, in surprise. “Can you tell when your auntie is near?” I ask, curious. But, obviously, he doesn’t reply.

“Well, you’re very bright and chipper today,” I say when Cora opens the door and peers into the car, blinking a bit in surprise at the two extra men in the row of seats behind me, and then at the guard sitting beside Conner in the passenger seat.

“I am indeed,” Cora says, climbing into her seat and closing her door behind her.

“Um, what’s all this?” she asks, a little hesitant before murmuring a hello to Rafe and leaning down to kiss him on the head.

“Sinclair wanted us to have extra guards,” I say, giving a chagrined little shrug.

“Do you mind? I told him he could.” “Yeah,” she says, after smiling around at everyone and saying her hellos as Conner pulls away from the house.

“Actually,” she continues, ” Roger had the same idea. Did they coordinate this morning?” “Probably,” I say, rolling my eyes and making my sister laugh. I shake my head, thinking that our two wolf mates sometimes really do have the same mind, even if they’re such different people.

“So!” I continue, leaning forward and grinning at Cora. “Why are you so happy this morning?” “I’ll tell you later,” she says, waving a hand at me while she glances around at the four men in the car.

Sensing that Cora wants to keep her reason for her happiness private, my grin deepens. “Oh!” I say, leaning forward, “so you and Roger were...” And then I lean forward, trying to scent her over Rafe, to see if I can prove my suspicions correct – “Ew, Ella!” Cora gasps, leaning forward to smack me in the arm.

“Stop doing that it’s none of your business!” And then she blushes terribly as I burst into laughter. Cora glances around at all of the men who are pretending, quite studiously, that they can’t hear us at all.

But I just laugh and turns away from my sister to look out the window. ” Fine, fine,” I say. “But I’ll get all your secrets out of you soon enough.

It’s a cheerful ride to the Human Camp – – Cora is clearly riding high, and I am feeling good myself. But things start to change as we approach and we’re able to see a little bit of what we’re going to be working with through the fence before us.

"Oh geeze," Cora says, leaning forward to peer through the chain-link. "This looks...Ella, this looks worse than what Isabel showed us yesterday." "She said I would be," I reply, grimacing as well. But even a glance tells me that Cora is right – that Isabel may have been underselling the difference between these two refugee camps.

When we pull into the spot and begin to climb out of the car, Conner and the guard in front – Anthony, who was likewise with us at the bunker 1 step out first, looking around to ensure that all is well. When Rafe is safely strapped to my chest, Cora and I step out next, the extra two guards following. A big smile breaks out onto my face as I see Dr. Hank standing awkwardly at the entrance to the camp, Isabel at his side.

"Hank!" I call, waving to him as I hurry over, Cora following slowly behind. I turn to see a little frown on her face, but I ignore it as I give Hank a hug and smile at Isabel. "So, you two have already met?" "Yessss," she says, turning to raise an eyebrow at me. "Though I wish you'd have told me he was coming." "I was asked to come," Hank insists, frowning at Isabel in turn.

"I didn't say you weren't," Isabel says, looking at him coolly. I hesitate now, looking between them. What was...what's wrong?

"May I have a word, Ella?" Hank asks, nodding over his shoulder to an empty space behind him where we can speak alone.

"Sure," I say, stepping aside with him. But he sighs when Conner and another guard step forward as well.

"It's all right," I say, putting up a hand to stop them. Both hesitate, but they let me go when Hank and I step a few feet away. Hank has, after all, been cleared as a trustworthy person and certainly not a threat. "What's – what's wrong, Hank?" "You're underestimating this, Ella," he says, frowning at me and glancing over at Cora, Isabel, and all of the other men. "Going in like this? It's never going to work." □ □