

Accidental Surrogate For Alpha By Caroline Above

#Chapter 81 – Roger Makes a Promise

Ella

I haven't been sick for a few days now, but when I see Roger standing on the other side of the door I immediately turn to one of the ornamental vases in the hallway and empty my stomach. Cora rushes forward to help me, glancing uncertainly at Roger as she pulls my hair back from my face.

I know that Sinclair and Roger are on better terms since the wild hunt, but I also know that their peace is very tenuous. Sinclair hasn't decided whether or not he truly trusts his brother yet, and though Roger has been helpful bringing intelligence from the Prince's camp, he could easily be playing the double agent for both sides – and now he knows my deepest, darkest

secret.

This is so bad. I think frantically. He told the Prince that Sinclair hadn't marked me, what if he tells him this too? Forget the blackmail – Roger is more dangerous to me than some bitter ex-employer could ever be!

I wipe the back of my hand over my mouth, straightening with a pitiful moan. I look over at Roger, finding his expression a combination of confusion and concern. "You'd better come in."

"Ella, I'm sorry." He begins hesitantly. "I didn't mean to startle you, and I wasn't trying to eavesdrop. I came over to check in with Sinclair and... well it wasn't difficult to overhear your conversation." 1

“I know, I know your shifter hearing is very acute.” I grumble.
“Trust me, I’m learning just how out of my depth I am every day.”

“I don’t understand.” Roger admits, following me into the sitting room. “How is this even possible?”

I sit down, graciously accepting a glass of water from my sister.
“Listen, I’ll tell you the truth, but only if you promise me that this conversation stays between us. I know you’ve been helping us lately, but I’m going to be honest I’m not convinced you’re actually on our side.”

“That’s fair.” Roger admits, looking drawn and pale. “After what I did... I know I don’t deserve your trust, or your forgiveness.”

“Well I’m sure I don’t need to tell you what would happen if this information got out. The only people who know are servants of this house, and my doctor. Not even Henry knows the truth, because if this becomes public information Sinclair’s campaign will be over. The Prince will become King, thousands would die under his tyranny – including me and your nephew.” I

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remark pointedly, holding my hand to my baby bump. “I don’t care what kind of sibling rivalry you have, or how strongly you think you should have Alpha- if you endanger my baby’s life, you won’t only have Sinclair to deal with I’ll kill you myself.”

“Ella!” Cora exclaims, shocked by my aggression. In truth I’ve shocked myself, but those primal Mama Bear instincts that started coming out at the ball are back in full force, and I don’t regret a single word I’ve spoken. I would do anything to protect my child, including killing to keep him safe.

“It’s okay.” Roger assures her. “You’re very spirited for a human. I can see why Sinclair picked

you.” He stares me in the eye, holding the contact as he makes his next promise. “And you have my

word that I’ll take this secret to my grave – I swear it on my mother’s grave.” “Good.” I nod, feeling a bit more relaxed now. “But you’re wrong if you think Sinclair picked me. This all started as a rather wild accident.”

“An accident?” Roger repeats, his brow knitting with confusion.

“It was my fault really.” Cora admits, relating the mix up at the sperm bank. Of course, her confession only leads to more questions, about why I went to the sperm bank in the first place, and how we figured out Sinclair’s sample had been used instead of the donor I chose. When he hears about Mike, I’m amazed to see how outraged he looks in my honor – I suppose messing with one’s fertility is a grave offense among wolves, even more so than with humans. “So you still don’t know how the samples got switched?” Roger presses, after we move past the Mike of it all.

“No.” Cora and I say in unison. “The surveillance cameras were disabled in the lab – before the samples were switched. And of course we don’t film in the exam rooms.”

“What?” I inquire, “this is the first I’m hearing of the security cameras being tampered with.” “That’s one of the reasons they eventually let me off the hook.” Cora informs me. “Sinclair ordered them to hire me back, but the investigation didn’t actually move away from me as a suspect until they found the tapes were blank during your appointment. I don’t have access to the surveillance monitors.”

“Does that mean...” I can hardly wrap my brain around this.

“We’ve been assuming this was an accident all along, and I could even understand someone erasing them after the fact to cover

their mistake... but if someone turned the cameras off before the switch then it must have been on purpose.”

“But why would anyone try to inseminate a human?” Roger questions, aghast. “I mean no shifter I know would imagine it was possible for you to actually conceive. I still can’t believe it myself.”

“I don’t know how it was possible – and honestly I don’t care. This baby is a miracle for me whether it’s a human, or a wolf.” I shrug, though in truth I feel quite uneasy. “But it does make me nervous to think someone might have done this to us. Even if they knew I could. conceive, what was their goal? I highly doubt anyone would do this just to make my dreams of becoming a mother or Dominic’s of becoming a father – come true.”

“True.” Cora nods sympathetically, “I have a hard time thinking their motives were pure, but I also don’t see an opportunity for malice either. How does you having a shifter baby help anyone?”

“This has to be the weirdest crime in history.” I express, absolutely flabbergasted.

“Cora, who has access to both your labs and the security rooms, and who else knew you had Dominic’s sperm?” Roger asks, obviously as curious as we are.

“My bosses” Cora shrugs, “but they’re also the ones running the investigation. Sinclair has some some of his men on it as well, but as far as I know, no one has ever been arrested or charged ”

“I can ask him about it once he comes home “I suggest, “with everything else going on, I sort of forgot about all this, but ! bet he hasn’t.”

“You can count on that.” Roger confirms, cocking his head to the side. “So what happens after the baby comes? You mentioned

losing its scent. Has Sinclair talked to you about his plans for keeping your identity secret?”

“We’re just trying to get through the campaign.” I explain, blushing to think of everything he must have overheard. “Afterwards I can step back from the public eye and... I don’t know, we’ll take it from there. If he has plans he hasn’t talked to me about them, but I trust we’ll think of something.”

Roger is staring at me with an unreadable expression, and for a moment I assume he’s judging me. “What?” I ask softly, “You think I’m being too optimistic? Or too trusting?”

“No.” He counters, shaking his head with a look of begrudging respect. “I was actually thinking that you’re incredibly brave to be doing this, and incredibly generous to be helping Dom. You must have been so overwhelmed when he asked for your help,” He clenches his shut, and for some reason I think I sense some guilt when he continues, “and Goddess, those eyes

rogue attacks... you must have been so terrified.”

“Actually it was her suggestion to pose as Luna.” Cora boasts, focusing on the less traumatic portion of Roger’s statement. I smile at her, thankful she’s looking out for me this way. She grins back, continuing. “He only wanted her as a surrogate at first, but she proved how valuable she could be to him.”

Roger shakes his head, frowning deeply. “I’m so sorry, Ella.”

“For what?” I ask, confused.

“For being so cruel to you. For helping the Prince. If I’d known... I never would have... I’m just so sorry.” Roger professes, looking completely genuine. 3

“Well, that’s all ancient history now.” I exhale heavily, wondering how much harder it must have been for Sinclair to forgive his brother after all their history, when I find it difficult after only just meeting him. “As long as you’re on our side from here on out I don’t care about the past.”

“You are too kind for your own good, you know that?” Roger asks, huffing out a laugh. There’s a spark of true admiration in his eyes, a spark that looks dangerously close to attraction as his gaze sweeps from my face and scans my figure.

“I keep trying to tell her that.” Cora declares. “Much good that it does me. She’s a stubborn thing.”

“Well I might be, but I’m not sure Dominic is going to be so calm when he finds out you know my secret.” I advise honestly. “You might want to leave before he gets home – let me break it to him.”

“That’s probably wise.” Roger agrees, rising to his feet. “I really am sorry, Ella.”

“I know.” I nod. “Now go he’ll be here any moment.”

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#Chapter 82 – Sinclair Takes on a Blackmailer

Sinclair

When I arrive at the home of Ella’s former employer, it takes all my strength to push my wolf down deep. The last thing I need is to actually murder a human, no matter how badly I might want to.

She deserves it. My wolf mutters mutinously, think about how easy it would be. Then she'd never be able to hurt Ella again.

Maybe so, but Ella wouldn't like it. I remind him, recalling how the precious creature had worried for the children, even when her own safety and happiness was on the line.

Hmph, she's got you wrapped around her little finger. My wolf accuses.

Oh, like she doesn't have you in the exact same position? I scoff. I'd like to see you resist her when she's blinking those beautiful big eyes up at you, begging you not to orphan innocent children.

Please, you spoke over the phone! He reminds me, his voice trailing off into growls of longing as he pictures her. You couldn't see her eyes or those plump, pouty lips or the sweet swell of her belly. You couldn't smell her delectable scent or...

And I'm the one who's whipped? I roll my eyes as I knock on the heavy rosewood door.

To my surprise, Jake and Millie answer the door, tilting their blonde heads up to me with excited grins. "Mr. Sinclair!"

My wolf calms as soon as he sees the children, softening like the big teddy bear he is. "Well hello!" I drop down to their level, unable to resist their adorable smiles. "I haven't seen you two in ages, what have you

been up to?"

my tie.

"We have a new nanny." Millie whispers conspiratorially, reaching out to play with "She never takes us on walks in the neighborhood." Jake explains, clearly blaming his new carer for

our increasingly infrequent meetings. "She's too lazy and she hates being outside." "That's too bad." I commiserate, pulling Millie into my arms and lifting her up as I ruffle Jake's hair affectionately. "Doesn't she know growing boys and girls need to get out and explore?"

"I don't think so." Millie frowns seriously. "She's not very smart."

"I miss Ella." Jake adds miserably. "Mommy's been saying lots of mean things about her, but we don't believe her. Ella was the best nanny we've ever had."

"Well I know Ella misses you too." I confide. "You know she's living with me now?"

"She is?" Jake gapes. "You mean you get to play with her all day long?"

"Whenever you want?" Millie adds in awe.

"Well, not whenever I want." I confess. If only they knew how badly I'd like to stay home with Ella all day, both playing and not playing "My job keeps me very busy, but she's there in the morning and when I get home at night. She tells me how badly she wants to see you."

"Maybe you can convince Mommy to let her visit?" Jake suggests, staring up at me so hopefully I feel guilty for thinking that nothing I could possibly say to their horrible mother will make her come around.

"I can try." I promise, patting the boy on the shoulder, "and you two should know you're welcome at my home anytime."

Maybe we should get rid of their mother after all. My wolf insinuates in my head. Think how happy Ella would be if we brought them home with us.

I'm not stealing children just to make Ella smile. I argue, tempting as it may be.

Spoilsport. His objections are interrupted when Jake and Millie's mother appears at the top of the stairs. She stops dead when she sees me. Her face pales, but she plasters on a phony smile. "Mr. Sinclair, to what do we owe this honor?"

"You and I need to speak." I answer coldly, surprising the children. I set Millie on the ground, smiling widely so that they know my harsh tone is not directed at them. "Your Mommy and I need a few minutes alone, but I'll come say goodbye, before I leave. I promise."

Their mother calls for the nanny, her voice very shrill. The children are swept away by a middle aged woman with a grim face, and I'm struck by how uninterested she seems in her charges. She doesn't even speak to them as she leads them out of the room.

"Well, Mr. Sinclair, what can I help you with?" Ella's blackmailer questions, as if she doesn't already know why I'm here. She guides me into a parlor, gesturing towards a plush couch. "Please, have a seat."

"No." I declare firmly. "Call me crazy, but I don't think false politeness is appropriate when you're threatening my family."

Her eyes go wide, and her heart rate increases, racing violently in her chest. "I-I'm sure I don't know what you're talking about."

"Do not lie to me." I growl, letting some of my wolf's ferocity bleed into my voice. The woman reels back, shivering for reasons she doesn't understand. She may have the dull intuition of a human, but even humans know when they're in the presence of a lethal predator intent on destroying them.

“Please, it wasn’t what you think!” She lies, her voice unsteady and choking with defiance.

“Oh I’d like to hear this.” I state ominously, prowling towards her. “I’d like to know what kind of twisted logic made you think it would be wise to try and blackmail the most powerful man on the continent.”

“But I wasn’t blackmailing you!” She immediately objects, too stupid to realize that I wouldn’t be nearly this angry if I had been her target. “I only wanted people to see that grasping little gold digger

”

“If you have any brains in that foolish head of yours, you’ll stop while you’re ahead.” I interrupt, clenching my hands into fists. “You may have no sense of loyalty yourself, but where I come from, if you threaten one member of the family you threaten all of them. If you insult one, you insult them all.”

“But that isn’t, I would never

“Let me tell you the situation you’re in “I cut her off again, my voice as deep as it can become

without devolving into wordless snarls. “You first fired my fiancée when she did nothing wrong. You deprived your own children of the most loving caregiver they could ever hope for. You spread rumors among your friends to ensure Ella wouldn’t be able to find another job.” The wretched woman is cowering against the wall now, having backed away from me until she could move no further.

I don’t show her any mercy, I continue stalking until I’m towering over her. “Now if it had been up to me, I would have destroyed you for that alone, but not Ella. She’s much too good, not that you

ever saw that. So I agreed to let you go on living your obscenely prosperous life without interference.”

I can smell her fear sour and acrid. “But then you learned that despite your efforts to ruin Ella’s life, she found happiness with me. Now I don’t know if you’re just so bitter and heartless that you couldn’t stand to see a hard-working young woman succeed, or if you saw my fortune and decided to try and steal part of it for yourself. But either way, you came into my home and called the mother of my child a cheap whore. You threatened to spread your in the tabloids. You tried to extort a man who could take away your wealth and your freedom lies with a single snap of my fingers, and you hurt the woman I love.” 2

I’m sure my wolf is glowing in my eyes, and suddenly the aroma of urine fills the air. I can see the hot liquid running down the woman’s stockings, and my adrenaline spikes with the knowledge that my prey is well and truly cornered. “You also alienated the only person who was protecting you from my wrath in the first place.”

“I’m sorry!” She sobs, shaking like a leaf. “I was a fool, I don’t know what I was thinking. I’ll do anything, just please don’t hurt me.”

“Shut up, you stupid cow.” I bite. “I’m not going to hurt you. I’m not even going to ruin your life, because Ella still loves your children even though they’ve got a worthless hag for a mother. But mark my words, if I ever see you near my family again, I will destroy you.” z

I proclaim, speaking with absolute conviction. “If the lies you tried to blackmail us with ever get out, if a single word of your vitriol makes it to a tabloid editor- whether you are the source or not – I will take away everything you care about in the world.”

She nods, sobbing and snivelling like a child. “I-I promise. You have my word.”

“Good.” I growl, starting to turn away. “And for the record, you absolute idiot – I own stock in every press outlet and newspaper from here to the coast. No one will ever publish a story about me without asking for my permission first. You think about that before you ever consider trying to get your story out as leverage against me.”

She sinks to the ground, and I leave her to wallow in her own shame and piss. I keep my promise of course, I go to wish the children farewell, and go home to tell Ella the news.

Accidental Surrogate For Alpha By Caroline Above Chapter 83

#Chapter 83 – Ella Talks Down a Wolf

Sinclair

It’s dark out by the time I get home, and I follow my nose upstairs to Ella’s room. She’s just stepping out of the shower when I walk in, her dripping body wrapped in a fluffy towel. Her rose gold hair is still dry, piled on top of her head and held secure with a pair of chop sticks.

She startles slightly when she sees me sitting on her bed, then rolls her eyes and huffs. “If you’re going to move around as silently as a ghost, would you at least announce yourself when you enter rooms, Dominic?”

I chuckle softly, raking my eyes over her wet skin. “Is that any way to greet your knight in shining armor?”

Ella steps forward before she can think to hide her nervous curiosity. “What happened?”

“Come give me a kiss hello, and I’ll tell you.” I invite, holding my arms open to her. Her muscles relax when she sees my easy mood, and she rolls her eyes again, smiling now. I growl playfully at her sass, and Ella quivers visibly, her thighs clenching reflexively beneath the hem of her towel.

Ella crosses the floor, flushing prettily as she comes to stand between my legs. Her pink lips pucker, and she leans into my warmth, giving every indication that she’s about to brush her mouth over my own. However at the last moment she redirects, skirting away from my waiting lips and attempting to drop a kiss on my cheek. She doesn’t get very far – clearly the mischievous human forgot to account for shifter speed when she formed this plan. I intercept her mouth with my own, claiming her lips and rumbling my disapproval.

Ella giggles softly, even as I tease the seam of her lips with my tongue, and flip her onto the bed. My clothes grow damp as her towel slips away and the liquid dotting her skin absorbs into the cloth of my shirt and trousers. I slant my lips over hers, delving into her sweet mouth and coaxing her tongue into a dance. Her arms and legs wrap around me in welcome, and I’m sorely tempted to strip so that I can feel her every inch of her naked body against my own.

I pull the pins from Ella’s hair, letting it fall down around her face and sending her lovely scent fluttering into the air around us. I continue stealing kiss after kiss, caressing Ella’s sides and silky thighs, dragging the sweetest sounds from her lips. My wolf purrs in reply, and I graze my scruffy jaw over the soft skin of her cheek, changing her contented murmurs into a fresh burst of giggles.

Chuckling with dark, sexual intent, I bury my face into her neck and give the velvety swath of skin the same treatment. Pausing to explore the abraded territory with my tongue, I drag one large palm over her round bottom. Squeezing her lush rear end, I continue kissing my way down to her chest. Ella's breath catches as I brush my fangs over the swell of her breast, then yelps in surprise when I nip her sensitive flesh.

"That's for not letting me kill that horrible woman in your honor" I inform her, moving my mouth to the other breast to give it the same treatment. "That's for rolling your eyes at me." This time the playful bite is met with a moan, and her nipples harden into tight buds dangerously close to my questing lips. Not trusting myself not to suck one of the sweet buds into my mouth, I finish my rebuke with a single swat to her behind "And that's for trying to withhold kisses I earned fair and square"

"I still haven't heard how you earned them." Ella argues cheekily, squirming against me and making the quickly stiffening member between my legs strain against my zipper. I pull away from her slightly, pushing up onto my elbow to gaze down at her, and wondering if this was actually a bigger mistake. At least when she was flush against me I couldn't see her many charms.

"Well, you don't have to worry about being blackmailed ever again." I assure her, looking down into her lovely face and wondering if there's ever been anyone so irresistible. "At least, not from your former employer."

"Really?" Ella inquires, eyes bright as she props herself up too.

"Really," I confirm, brushing a few stray locks of hair back from her face. "I also saw Jake and Millie. I told them how much you

miss them, and they told me all about how horrible their new nanny is.”

Her face falls, and suddenly I regret sharing this particular detail. “Did they seem very unhappy?” Ella asks anxiously.

“They seemed as sweet as ever.” I share, “and I don’t think they’re being mistreated. I think she’s just not any fun.”

Ella nods thoughtfully, peeking up at me from beneath her long, dark lashes. “How did you convince her to drop the story?”

“It wasn’t hard.” I explain, watching the progress of my fingers as I trace them down her arm, leaving a trail of gooseflesh in their wake. “I simply made sure she realized how foolish it was to threaten a man as powerful as I am. Her imagination did all the rest, but I still would have liked to kill her.”

“Well I’m glad you didn’t.” Ella replies firmly. “We don’t need to be inviting more trouble to our doorstep.”

“Oh I agree.” I muse, laughter obvious in my voice as I move my hand to her belly. “My hands are plenty full with you and this little one.”

“Our baby is not trouble.” Ella objects, narrowing her eyes at me.

“Oh I don’t know about that.” I tease. “With you for a mother? I’d say he’s bound to have a mischievous streak a mile wide – though we won’t have to worry about that for some time.” “And I suppose you were always perfectly well behaved?” Ella counters, arching one smooth brow. “I ought to ask Henry how you were as a boy. I bet he has all sorts of stories to share.” “I was an absolute angel.” I lie, trying my best to sound self-righteous.

“I don’t believe that for a single second.” Ella laughs.

“You hear that, Rafe?” I ask our son, beaming when a little kick pulses in Ella’s tummy, right on the other side of my hand. “As if your Mommy hasn’t been naughty enough today – now she’s calling me a liar.”

“Dominic?” Ella’s serious tone pulls my eyes up to her face. “Something else happened today, while you were out.”

“What?” I press, sensing that she’s not merely trying to distract me from our flirting.

“Well Cora came over and I was talking to her about everything that’s been going on.” Ella

begins slowly, not meeting my gaze. “And well... the short version is that Roger came over while she was here. He heard part of our conversation and... he knows I’m human.

“What!?” I explode, surging to my feet.

Ella immediately scrambles out of bed after me. Her tiny hands close around my arms, as if she’s afraid I’m going to run out on her. “It’s okay, he stayed and we talked. I explained the situation and he honestly seemed to listen. He promised not to tell ever. He apologized for everything that’s happened, and the only reason he left is because I made him. I thought you should hear it from me.”

“Ella, why didn’t you tell me sooner!” I demand, trying not to lose my temper. “I’m not convinced that Roger is actually on our side and with this information, the Prince could end my campaign like that,” I say, snapping my fingers.

“I know, but you only just got home, and I wanted to hear how things went at Jake and Millie’s.” Her face twists into an accusatory stare, “And I’m not the one who got us all sidetracked with kisses.”

Sighing, I acknowledge that I didn't give her much chance to tell me this latest development." What exactly did Roger say?"

"Well, we talked about how it happened and Cora explained that the surveillance footage was tampered with which I didn't even know about until today." Ella shares, an open question in her expression.

I nod, "I knew, but we still aren't any close to understanding who was behind this or what they were hoping to achieve."

"Well, Roger just kind of talked through the possibilities with us and everything. He seemed to really regret helping the Prince, I mean I actually thought he looked as though he felt guilty about working against us." Ella conveys softly, her hands stroking my arms in long, steady movements clearly intended to calm me.

"He should." I mutter bleakly. Ella doesn't know that Roger helped orchestrate the attack in the alley, and unless Roger becomes a problem, I don't see a reason to tell her. It would only hurt her feelings, and if Roger is truly on our side then I don't want more space between them. "And I think you're probably right. I trust your judgement. But I need to go see him, just to be sure."

"You won't hurt him, will you?" Ella presses.

"No sweetheart, I promise I'm in control." I vow. "Just give me a couple of hours. I'll go talk to Roger and then I've got that bloody, 'have a drink with the Alpha' event – but I'll be home by dinner. We can have a nice night together and forget all this ever happened."

"Okay." She agrees, stepping away from me. "I'll see you soon, then."

Of course, if I'd known then what I know now... I would never have left the house that night. I would have stayed home with Ella

and blown off my brother and the campaign. I could have saved us all a lot of trouble if I had.

#Chapter 84- Sinclair Makes a Detour

Sinclair

When I reach Roger's house, he's not the least bit surprised to find me darkening his doorway. "I was wondering when you were gonna show up." He quips, opening the door wide to welcome me inside.

"Am I that predictable?" I grouse, stepping over the threshold.

"No- I still wasn't sure whether or not you'd rip my head off after you arrived." Roger shares wryly.

"You've been talking with Ella." I assess coolly, recalling the sweet human's objection to me using this precise tactic against our enemies.

Roger snorts. "Not necessary. I grew up with you, I know your MO, brother."

"Well you have Ella to thank for my even temper either way. She seems to trust you'll keep your word and protect her secret." I explain, eyeing him suspiciously.

"And you came to find out if she's right." Roger guesses.

"Is she?" I inquire. "Or is this another one of your tricks?"

"It's not a trick." Roger states simply, leading me into his study. "But I'm not doing it for you – I'm doing it for her."

I absorb this information slowly. It does seem easier to believe my brother would help a stranger sooner than he'd help me, but there's also something in his tone, some unspoken emotion I

don't quite understand. "Why do you care what happens to her?" I inquire.

"Because she's exactly what you've been saying she is all along. She's brave and clever and good to her very core. Goddess only knows how you managed to get her, but you certainly don't deserve her." Roger replies, giving me a begrudging look that tells me he's only half joking. 2

My wolf growls possessively in my head, he likes her.

Good, if he likes her he'll help us. I answer evenly.

But she's mine. My wolf argues fiercely. He shouldn't even be allowed to look at her.

Would

you get a hold of yourself? I admonish.

I won't share her! The stubborn predator is digging in his heels, making my hackles raise and claws extend. This is why we need to claim her, so that other wolves won't come sniffing around our mate.

You're acting like a child. I'm losing my temper now, sick and tired of being at odds with my inner animal. She isn't our mate and I'm not going to hurt her with a claiming mark her body can't handle. Besides, even if Roger is interested in Ella, she isn't interested in him. Have some self-respect.

"I haven't got her not the way you mean." I correct, shaking myself out of my inner conflict "She's been adamant about that she's only interested in me as her baby's father "1 share, deciding that my brother doesn't need to know how complicated my relationship with

Ella truly is.

Roger snorts, “Who are you kidding? That woman is clearly infatuated with you, and I know you want her for keeps. Your wolf is bloody besotted.”

“She’s carrying my pup, that’s changing both of us, neither of us can trust our feelings right now.” I reason, using the same logic with him that I’ve been employing to justify my own restraint. If I let myself believe that everything happening between Ella and I is real, there will be no holding my wolf back, and I don’t want to frighten or push her into something she doesn’t truly want, or isn’t ready for.

“You know as well as I do that pregnancy can’t magically make people fall in love, even if they’re already interested in each other.” Roger scoffs, sounding truly jealous now. “Don’t waste a gift, Dom.”

I stop dead in my tracks. “Whoever said anything about love?”

His eyes roll into the back of his head. “Honestly Dominic, sometimes I think you don’t have a brain in your head.”

“We only just met.” I remind him. “And we’ve experienced nothing but drama since then, it’s not just the pregnancy that can toy with emotions.”

“It sounds to me like you’ll take any excuse to deny what’s staring you in the face. And if you don’t wise up and do something about it, other wolves who aren’t so hard-headed are going to start horning in on your territory.” Roger warns, sounding as if he’d like to lead the charge. “Ella might not be able to serve as a true Luna, but that’s only a concern if you have a pack to lead. No one will care if she’s human when she can clearly bear shifter children.”

“Is that a threat?” I counter, my defenses riled by the obvious longing in his voice.

“I’m not delusional enough to think that Ella could ever forgive me for helping the Prince plan the first attack.” Roger sighs.

“But you can still hope.” I suggest, letting a note of menace bleed into my voice.

“Dominic, I’m done battling with my own family. From the sounds of it, we’re going to need each other in the months ahead... if there’s to be a war – we can’t be divided.” He grimaces, though I note he didn’t really answer my question. After all, it’s one thing to say you won’t pursue someone, and another to say you don’t want to in the first place.

“I’m trying to win so that there won’t be a war.” I grumble. “But I agree, we’ve been enemies for too long. No woman should come between brothers, and unlike Lydia, Ella would never want to.”

“Lydia couldn’t help it.” Roger defends, some of his old animosity rising to the surface. “It was the bond.”

I purse my lips, trying to decide whether or not I want to tell Roger the truth about Lydia. He’s never been willing to listen before, and I know this is an opportunity to clear the air between us. I also know it could backfire catastrophically. “Roger, Lydia used us both “I declare, deciding that more lies won’t help anything. “I know what she told you, but she knew we were fated for two years before she left you.”

“What?” Roger gapes, the gears visibly turning in his mind as he struggles to process this information. “No, your bond manifested when you turned 18.”

I shake my head, determined to make him hear me out. “It manifested when I was 16, but Dad didn’t name me his heir until I

reached adulthood. The only reason she decided to give into fate was because he announced it on my birthday. Before that she made it perfectly clear I wasn't good enough for her."

Roger slumps into a chair. "But, you never said..."

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"Why would I? She didn't want me and I wanted you to be happy. I didn't want to give you another reason to hate me." I confess.

"So why did you betray me?" He hisses, his wolf glowing in his eyes. "If you really wanted me to be happy you could have rejected her when she changed her mind?"

"I was a pup!" I exclaim. "I'd spent two years in misery, longing for my mate. My wolf was half mad with unrequited feelings and I was too young to know better. I was blinded by our bond, and it wasn't until years later that I realized what a fool I'd been. I never wanted to hurt you... I just wasn't strong enough to resist fate. Not then, at least."

Roger sits back, watching me closely. After a few long moments, he scrubs his palm over his face, and I'm shocked to see his eyes are red – on the verge of tears. "I haven't been a very good brother to you, have I?"

"You've been a pain in the ass." I quip, huffing an exasperated laugh. "Roger, when we were little you were my hero. I would have followed you anywhere!"

"But I never let you." He finishes my thought, clamping his eyes shut. "Dad tried to tell me a thousand times that it wasn't your fault Mom died. And I know it wasn't fair of me to treat you so horribly. In hindsight, I don't even think you're the one I hated, I was just so mad at the Goddess for taking her from me, and I needed someone to blame."

“I know.” I affirm, remembering our argument after the Wild Hunt. It seems like every other conversation we have these days is some long overdue emotional blowout. We’ve poured out years worth of feelings and resentments in a handful of weeks, and already our relationship feels like it’s turned a corner. For the first time since I was a child, I feel like my brother is more friend than enemy.

Roger is giving me a watery smile, and I realize he’s realizing the same thing I am. “And to think, all it took was one tiny human to finally make us talk all this out.”

To my amazement, I’m smiling back. “One tiny, very special human.” I correct, thinking of the beautiful creature I left at home.

Roger frowns, “At some point we need to talk about how this all started, Dom. Ella said you still don’t know how your sample got switched in the sperm lab.”

“That’s a conversation for another time.” My jaw clenches reflexively. “I haven’t told Ella yet, but my investigators have come across evidence which suggests whoever is responsible is very powerful... and they knew exactly what they were doing.”

#Chapter 85 – Ella Starts to Worry

Sinclair

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When I enter the Blood Moon Tavern for the ‘have a drink with the Alpha’ town hall event, immediately begin cursing Hugo. My beta may have talked me into this campaign event with good intentions, but I would so much rather go home to Ella. After the way we left things this evening, not to mention my conversation with Roger, my wolf is positively rabid to go climb into bed with her and finish what we started.

However, I made a pledge to my pack that I would come out to this bar and talk with the people one on one, giving them an opportunity to share their thoughts, grievances and questions with me in an informal setting. It's the sort of event the Prince would never consider holding, and also the kind common shifters appreciate most. So I plaster a smile on my face and enter the rustic pub, greeting the assembled pack members as if there's nothing I would rather be doing.

At first I'm completely distracted, preoccupied with thoughts of Ella, our growing pup and whether it might be possible that my brother is right. Could our feelings for each other be more than mere attraction and the connection forged by our pup? Could we be falling in love? I'm not even sure I know what love feels like – of course I imagined myself head over heels for Lydia once, but can there be true love when one partner is only in the relationship for selfish, personal gain? Can a person honestly know what it means to be in love, when it's all one sided?

A burst of laughter and noise pulls my attention away from my thoughts, and suddenly I realize I've been neglecting my conversation with the pack members around me. "I know that look." One of the men in front of me guffaws, slapping his leg. "I'd say the Alpha has his mind on things far lovelier than taxes."

"A certain she-wolf with a swollen belly perhaps?" Another wolf suggests, waggling his eyebrows.

I laugh apologetically, though none of the wolves surrounding me seem upset. They all look as though they understand all too well. "I'm sorry, you've caught me. I have a hard time letting my mate out of my sight these days." I confess, knowing that speaking plainly is far more likely to win me points with this demographic.

“It’s no worry.” An older man assures me, patting my back. “I remember what it was like when my wife was breeding, and it’s always worst with the first.”

“When I found out my Mary was pregnant, I actually attacked one of her colleagues when he got too close to her!” Another man shares, “luckily he didn’t hold it against me.”

I chuckle, “My wolf wanted me to go after Ella’s doctor and the nurses when we first got the news – men and women.” I relate, earning myself a fresh round of laughter. “Luckily she’s learned to climb into my arms anytime I start getting aggressive, the clever minx knows I can’t attack anyone if I’m holding her.”

They raise their brows with approval, not just any she wolf can take on an Alpha’s riled wolf, even when it’s their mate I swell with pride over their impressed looks, but settle in to listen rather than continue spending my own voice I’m amazed that this burly group of hardened shifters is so content to talk about she wolves and babies rather than politics or security, but before long all the rough and tumble bar patrons are exchanging stories of becoming fathers

and the antics of their children. I’m suddenly wishing I’d brought my own father along, and thinking that I wouldn’t mind campaign events so much if they were all like this.

I order a second drink as the tales unfold, but set it down after a few sips. Though I requested the same brand of liquor as my first tumbler-full, there’s a strange metallic taste to the liquid that turns my stomach. I wonder if soap was left in the glass after being washed, or perhaps the bartender opened a new bottle, not realizing the liquor inside had turned. Unfortunately I never figure out what’s wrong with the draught, because the last thing I remember is thinking that it tastes off, and then everything is dark.

Ella

When Sinclair doesn't come home in time for dinner, I assume the campaign event ran long. I'm disappointed, but I know that these things are often out of his hands. Winning the crown is more important than spending time with me, and only a complete narcissist could be upset by that fact.

Says the woman who wants to curl up in a ball and cry because Sinclair cares more about the campaign than you. The little voice in my head remarks dryly.

That's not fair. I answer, beyond frustrated. Those are more hormones talking, not logic. Sure, sure. She snips. Blame the baby.

I pat my tummy. "I don't blame you." I tell my growing pup, "I do, however, blame my body." The baby flutters and kicks against my hand, as if he's telling me he understands completely. I feel a rush of love so powerful my dour mood disappears, and I can only smile as I get through my meal, content to talk to the tiny being inside me.

Unfortunately, my good mood only lasts until I realize it's almost nine o'clock, and Sinclair still hasn't come home. I decide to call him, but the line rings and rings before eventually going to voicemail. I hang up and send him a quick text: Just checking in, is the event going alright?

Nothing.

Sighing, I put my phone aside and decide to take a bath. I'm worrying about nothing, the sooner I stop thinking about Sinclair, the sooner he'll be home.

I don't know. My conscience interjects, something feels off to me. Are you sure he's okay.

It was an event at a bar, he probably just got caught up. Or maybe he decided to have a night out he never gets to do anything for himself. He deserves to let loose a little.

True, but I don't think he'd do that without telling you. The voice replies.

It probably slipped his mind. I insist, shaking off the sting carried by the idea of being an afterthought to him.

I fill the huge whirl pool tub in Sinclairs bathroom, choosing to use his rooms instead of my own, just in case he comes home while I'm soaking. I have a sudden, silly fantasy of him walking in while I'm submerged in the hot water and bubbles. I imagine him claiming that he's dirty after his night out and insisting that he needs to join me. I picture him climbing into the tub with me, and settling me between his legs.

As I sink into the steaming water, I slide my own hands over my soft skin, pretending that they're Sinclairs – knowing he'll probably demand to wash me himself, and getting lost in the sensations. My hand lingers over my breasts and between my legs, Sinclair's deep voice filling my head with flimsy excuses about how he has to make sure all my important parts are clean.

Before long I'm breathing heavily and flushed for reasons that have nothing to do with the heat of the bath, and I decide this has to stop before Sinclair walks in and catches me in a much more intimate act than bathing. I wash quickly, settling down enough to soak, but soon the water grows cold, and I have no choice but to get out.

I check the time as I pull on a plush robe. 11 o'clock now. I retrieve my phone, only to find that I haven't had any calls or texts from Sinclair. Feeling truly worried now, I call him again. I know it's not very late, but he promised to be home hours ago, and I've

never known him to run late without communicating the delay. When I get his voicemail I try calling two more times, and send a couple more texts for good measure.

Are you okay? I was expecting you hours ago.

Should I wait up?

Why do I feel so anxious about asking these simple questions? I got past my wariness of scaring Sinclair off ages ago, and yet this still feels like a test, like I might be coming on too strong or seem needy for worrying about him.

That's Mike's influence. The little voice in my head reminds me. He would accuse you of being a nagging shrew if you wanted to know when to expect him home, that's not Sinclair. Don't put that on him.

Then why hasn't he called me? Why isn't he responding?

Something's wrong. My conscience insists, more forcefully now.

I decide to call Roger, just to make sure Sinclair actually made it to the campaign event after their talk. He answers quickly, but confirms Sinclair left hours ago. He tells me to sit tight while he goes to the bar, and so I hang up and try to be patient.

In the end, I don't have to wait for Roger to call me back. My phone chirps, and I see a message from Sinclair.

Stop bothering me – I found better company for the night.

Then, immediately following the text, a photo appears. Sinclair is naked in a strange bed, his eyelids heavy over a sultry stare, his clothes from this evening slung over a nightstand. And there beside him, naked as the day she was born – is Lydia.

#Chapter 86 – Sinclair Wakes with His Ex

Sinclair

The world is fuzzy when I wake.

I sit up, instantly on edge. My wolf knows something is wrong, not that this is any great feat of instinct. I don't recognize my surroundings, and I have no recollection of falling asleep. The last thing I remember is being at the 'have a drink with the Alpha' event and talking about fatherhood with my constituents.

How much time has passed? I wonder, my thoughts trapped in a strange fog. I feel hungover, but I can't imagine I had enough alcohol to render me in such a state. It's already light out, and why do I smell...

"Lydia!" I exclaim, scanning the space for my ex-wife. The entire room reeks of her, and belatedly I realize we're in a hotel. I can sense her presence in the other room, but as I slide from bed I realize I'm completely naked.

She appears in the doorway of the bathroom, leaning against the frame. She's wearing my dress shirt from last night. It's unbuttoned from collar to hem, making it clear that she's nude underneath. I'm sure she intended it to give me tantalizing flashes of her tan skin, but I feel no attraction for her at all. My wolf is roaring in my head, my hackles raising defensively when Lydia flashes her fangs in a lethal grin. "Good morning, lover."

"What have you done?" I snarl, not bothering to hide my outrage and disgust. Slowly, so slowly I feel furious with my own dull wits, a picture is forming in my mind. The puzzle pieces are slowly clicking into place. I feel so groggy, achy and nauseous, not because I'm hungover, but because I was drugged.

That metallic taste in my drink. I realize angrily, wishing I'd had the sense to walk out of the pub the moment I realized something was off. I glance again to the windows, realizing it must be morning already. I have no memory of last night and no way of knowing what I did in my drugged state. Did she give me something that unhinged me enough that I would actually sleep with her? Did I make a scene when I left the bar?

"Dominic, I haven't done anything!" Lydia exclaims, looking offended. "Don't you remember? We ran into each other after your event last night. I guess without your hanging on your arm you were finally able to remember why we're so good together."

little pet

Ella! I think suddenly. I promised her I'd be home in time for dinner, she must be so worried! Where's my phone?" I demand sharply.

Lydia's mouth drops open, and some of her haughtiness sleeps away. "Seriously?!" She bursts out, "that's all it takes, one mention of the little bitch and you just forget I exist?"

Without thinking, I lunge for Lydia, my claws and fangs extended, my shoulders shaking with the effort of holding off the urge to shift. I stop myself short of reaching for her, though my wolf is sorely tempted. "Don't you ever talk about Ella that way. In fact, keep her name and any other foul nicknames you come up with, out of your mouth completely."

"What are you doing?" Lydia sputters, flinching and backing away from me. "I'm your mate. You can't.... This isn't..."

"You think I can't threaten you? You think I can't hurt you if you endanger my family?" I

snap. “You aren’t my mate anymore, Lydia, and you weren’t ever worthy of being Luna even when you had the title.” Despite my words, even I’m shocked at how easy I find it to show aggression to her. Everything I know about fated mates has taught me that I shouldn’t be able to stomach raising a hand against her, but it’s almost as if she and Ella have traded places in my heart. Now my wolf only cares for protecting the mother of our pup, even if it means protecting her from my once-fated mate.

“I haven’t done a thing to your disgusting little family.” Lydia spits, hissing like a cat.

“You drugged me.” I accuse. “What if I let something sensitive slip under the influence? How did you get me out of that bar? What if someone saw us leaving together? You might have compromised my campaign!” I thunder, “and that does threaten my family – make no mistake.”

“Who are you!” Lydia explodes, furious and cowering at once. “People don’t just stop being mates, Dominic! You can’t just erase our past because you found a new plaything. You always said I was more important to you than politics... and now it’s like... Goddess, I don’t even recognize you!

“You didn’t really think that you could just walk out on me and I’d stay the same, did you? Did you expect me to wallow like a heartsick pup when I have a pack to lead and the fate of the entire fucking realm is on my shoulders? Did you really believe I’d stay here pining for you, and you would be able to walk back into my life like nothing happened?” I rumble coldly, wondering how I ever imagined myself in love with this woman. Ella would never ask me to choose her over the campaign, she wouldn’t want me to. “And for the record, Lydia. I said you were more important than politics, not the pack – not my duty to protect my people.”

“Well you didn’t care very much about your family or your pack last night.” Lydia announces spitefully, wearing a cruel smile that looks more like a grimace. “The time apart certainly didn’t cost us in the bedroom. You were every bit as ferocious and virile as ever. I might be pregnant already.” z

I try not to let her see how deeply her words cut me. The idea that I had sex with her under the influence of her drugs makes me sick to my stomach. I have no way of knowing if she’s telling the truth. There aren’t any marks on her body from hickeys or lovebites, and I don’t feel any scratches on my back or physical signs of the kind of rambunctious lovemaking we used to have, but then again if I was most unconscious then there wouldn’t be any of those signs. So while I’m sure her remarks about my ferocity are a lie, I can’t rule out sex entirely. The bed is in complete disarray, and she certainly smells like me. Is it just from sleeping together... or did she manage to steal my seed the way she’s suggesting.

“What would it matter if you’re pregnant?” I say instead. “I already have my heir.”

“You know better than anyone that the first born child isn’t always the strongest.” Lydia answers shrewdly, looking so cunning I wonder how Roger and I were ever fooled by her. And your current heir hasn’t even been born yet. It wouldn’t be a bad thing to have a spare. Goddess knows anything can happen between now and the birth.” She doesn’t say the words as a threat, but it’s hard not to hear them that way with all the attempts on Ella’s life. However Lydia isn’t paying attention to the dangerous line she’s walking, she presses on, rubbing her belly as if it’s confirmed that she’s breeding. “I guarantee any child of mine will be stronger than that pipsqueak’s. Soon you won’t have any need of Ella at all.

The petty part of me wants to lash out and tell Lydia that if it were possible for us to make a baby together it would have happened in the years we were married I want to tell her she's

delusional if she thinks she can get pregnant at all. But damn it if Ella's silky voice isn't interrupting my thoughts, encouraging me to show compassion even though this monster doesn't deserve any.

Just then I see my phone, balanced on the edge of the nightstand. I snatch it up and turn on the screen, immediately going to my messages. I'm not surprised to see multiple missed calls and texts from Ella, but I'm horrified when I see the response I sent her, and the photo. "You sent this to her?" I roar, thrusting the device towards Lydia's sneering face.

She smirks, "Of course not, that was all you."

I stalk forward, closing the final distance between us. "You better hope you are pregnant, Lydia." I declare icily, "because if you aren't, I swear to the Goddess I will hunt you down and make sure you can't ever come anywhere near me, or my family again." 1

I storm out without another word. I dial Ella as I race across town, unsurprised when she doesn't answer the phone. My wolf is already in a panic about her reaction to Lydia's taunting message. I don't care how drunk or disoriented I was, I know I wouldn't have ignored Ella that way not when she's all my wolf wants. Was she very upset? Did it exacerbate her stress to a dangerous level? I only stop for the barest second at a newsstand to make sure there's nothing in the papers about Lydia and I, before continuing to my mansion.

But when I arrive, Ella is nowhere to be found.

#Chapter 87 – Ella Runs Away

Ella

“Goddess, Cora, what’s wrong with me?” I moan, burying my head in my hands. “I’ve been thinking Sinclair is too good to be true all along. There cannot be a bigger red flag and I just ignored it. I let him love bomb me and I bought every manipulative word out of his mouth.” I’m seated in my sister’s living room, rocking back and forth in my seat while she looks on anxiously. After I received Sinclair’s text last night, I didn’t waste any time getting out of his house. I went out onto my balcony and waited until the patrolling guards passed by, then climbed down the trellis and out the back gate. There was a vicious thunderstorm roiling at the time, but I barely noticed. I ran through the pouring rain, not stopping until I reached Cora’s apartment.

In hindsight I’m sure I scared her half to death – turning up on her doorstep in the middle of the night, looking like a drowned rat. Nonetheless, she immediately ushered me in and got me a change of dry clothes and a cup of hot tea, but I wasn’t calm enough to actually explain what happened until this morning.

“Ella just slow down, I didn’t think anything had even happened between you two?” Cora asks, watching me with obvious concern.

“I mean, nothing huge.” I clarify. “We’ve flirted and kissed and fooled around a bit... and I’ve insisted that things not go any further. At least, I had enough sense to ensure we didn’t start an actual relationship.”

“And he agreed? You said no and he didn’t push you?” Cora presses.

“Yeah, I mean it’s been hard because we’re attracted to each other, but he’s been trying to respect my wishes.”

“Then how can he have love bombed you?” She inquires, looking confused.

*[guess that's the wrong expression." I concede. "It's just, you should hear the way he talks to me, and the way he behaves. He's so affectionate and warm that I got completely lulled into complacency. He just lavishes attention and compliments, and he actually listens and takes criticism. He takes my thoughts and opinions into account, and he has this silly side where he can be so fun and playful, but at the same time he doesn't let me get away with murder. He calls me on my shit and holds me accountable. Like I said, he's just too good to be true."

Cora is frowning deeply, keeping her expression guarded while she processes my words. "Ella

"What? Why are you looking at me that way?" I burst, instantly regretting my sharp tone. I'm sorry, I shouldn't have snapped at you..." Suddenly I want to cry. "I didn't mean it. I'm just really out of sorts."

"i know, honey." She murmurs, her brows furrowing in sympathy. "And don't take this the wrong way, but none of that sounds very bad. I mean, it's not like he's pretending to be this perfect person. You two started off on terrible footing. Terrible." She repeats for emphasis. He thought you were a gold digger and was going to separate you from your child. You had to learn to get along, and sure that happened fast once you decided to trust each other, but... I'm sorry Ella, but it honestly just sounds like you like each other." She leans forward, resting her

elbows on her knees and sending me serious therapist vibes. "Is it possible that you are so used to assholes like Mike, that you assume being treated well is evidence of some sort of trick?"

It takes me a moment to absorb that. Is she right? Am I so unused to receiving genuine affection and compliments that I somehow mistook them for Sinclair grooming me for abuse? Even as I think this, I recall the other things that have happened between us.

“That’s not all.” I confess, blushing scarlet. “Yes he’s affectionate and that feels strange to me, but he’s also bossy and domineering. He always expects to be in charge.”

“Of course he is, he’s an Alpha.” Cora remarks blithely.

“But, I mean, in charge in... well, I mean...”

Cora rolls her eyes. “Ella, stop beating around the bush, just tell me what happened.”

“It’s just that he doesn’t stop at giving orders, he holds me to them.” I confess. “Once, even spanked me.”

“Okay.” Cora responds, looking as though she’s waiting for me to say more.

he

“After the attack on the wild hunt.” I explain, offering the information freely now. “I mean... I slapped him first and he said all this crap about catharsis, but I didn’t even question it because he said it was normal with shifter couples.”

“You slapped Dominic Sinclair?” Cora gapes.

“He was annoying me!” I defend hotly. “He kept saying I should stay home and rest but I wasn’t about to let that foul prince win.”

“So let me get this straight...” Cora begins, clearly struggling to wrap her mind about this. You were in shock, being obstinate and refusing to take care of yourself, then you attacked him and he responded the way that any wolf would?”

“Basically.” I grimace, rubbing the back of my neck.

“Did he injure you?” She inquires, “Traumatize you?”

“No.” I’m blushing again. “It hurt, but it brought me out of my shock and it really did help me to cry... plus, well I was really turned on afterward.” I whisper, unable to believe I’m actually sharing this part.

Cora chuckles. “So what’s the problem?”

“You don’t find that strange!?” I exclaim.

“Ella, I’ve been around shifters a lot longer than you have.” Cora explains, sighing as though she’s not sure how to make me understand. “Power dynamics are a big part of their culture and from a scientific perspective it makes perfect sense. Dominance means strength and strength means survival. And if you liked it, who cares whether or not other people think it’s strange. You’d hardly be the only human who’s ever wanted that from a partner.

“I didn’t say I liked it.” I object. “Just that it helped me...and turned me on... and I did like feeling how in control he was when I was beside myself.”

“Do you want him to do it again?” She asks, grinning mischievously now.

I throw a pillow at her, laughing with faux outrage. I’m only just coming to terms with the fact that I do want to be with Sinclair that way again, when I remember why I’m here unloading all

this on my sister in the first place. My mood dampens almost immediately. “What I want doesn’t matter.”

Cora purses her lips, “Okay, so you haven’t been love bombed, and he hasn’t been mistreating you, and you don’t want a relationship, right?”

‘Right.’ I confirm, thankful that we worked through all this, but suddenly anticipating Cora’s next question.

“Then Ella, why are you so upset about Lydia?” She asks. “You told him point blank that you don’t want to be with him and you agreed to step aside if he finds a new mate from the beginning. I know you weren’t expecting it to be Lydia, but... so what if it is?”

“Because it means he lied to me.” I explain miserably. “It means he’s been lying to me about her for months, and that Roger was right about him running back to her at the first opportunity.”

“Are you sure they were lies?” Cora counters. “Do you think it’s possible he believed what he was telling you at the time, and then changed his mind? We all have blind spots when it comes to our exes. He wouldn’t be the first person to convince himself he hated his former partner to try and protect himself from getting hurt again.”

I shrug, suddenly doubting myself. “I don’t know. He certainly seemed to mean what he was saying at the time, but he’s also a politician, he’s bound to be a good liar.” 1

“He’s an Alpha, not a politician. And he also has the campaign to think about, he might have been resisting her for his sake and the pack’s at once.” Cora suggests.

“Maybe,” I acknowledge, hating how logical this sounds. The longer we talk I’m slowly losing my justifications for being so upset, but I still feel as if my world has come crashing down around me.

“Ella?” Cora calls my attention to her lovely face. Immediately I know she’s coming to the same conclusion I am. “You snuck out of the house and ran through the night, in a thunderstorm, when people have been trying to kill you. You’ve exhausted all the possible reasons to justify this except one, and a few lies on his part hardly seem enough to warrant how devastated you are.”

“What’s your point?” I remark sullenly, already knowing where this is going.

“Are you sure you don’t like him?” Cora asks bluntly. “Not just you’re attracted to him or like the affection, but that you have genuine feelings for him and you’re upset because you think he might not return your feelings now that he’s back with Lydia?”

Her words slam into me one after the other, but before I can give them the consideration they deserve, there’s a sudden pounding at the door.

#Chapter 89 – Jealousy

Sinclair

“I’m not jealous!” Ella explodes, almost as soon as the question left my mouth. Her heart is pounding in her chest, so fast and loud that I wouldn’t be able to tune it out if I tried. Her cheeks are consumed by a crimson blush, and my wolf is already celebrating in my head. She’s jealous! She has feelings! She knows she’s mine! Mine, mine, mine!

He has a point. Ella is not a good liar, and though she may be able to disguise her feelings under usual circumstances, her emotions are much too turbulent to allow that now. She sounded about as believable as a fox caught breaking into a henhouse, insisting it only wanted to look at the tasty morsels inside.

I arch my brow skeptically and, seeming to realize how defensive she just sounded, Ella takes a deep breath and tries again. “I’m not jealous.” She repeats, and though she does sound more convincing now, her body is still betraying her. Her color is still so high, and her heart is still racing. “I’m angry because you lied to me.”

I know I should correct her right here and now, explain exactly what happened last night whether she wants to hear it or not. But my inner hunter knows I'm onto something, and there's no turning off my prey drive. "Then you don't care whether I sleep with other she-wolves, as long as I'm honest about it?"

Her plump, pink lip – still stained with blood – trembles dangerously, and her voice sounds suddenly tight. "That's right."

Liar, liar, pants on fire! My wolf chants, running triumphant laps through my consciousness. He's zooming around like a puppy, though I can't let Ella see how excited I am. As thrilling as this revelation is, she is lying to me. I might be able to forgive that since I know she's trying to protect her tender heart, but forgiveness doesn't mean acceptance. "Are you being honest with me, little human?" I rumble, pinning her with a stern glower.

Ella's luminous gold eyes widen and her lips part on a startled gasp. I can see her preparing to answer me, to tell me another falsehood, but before she can say yes, she seems to realize how hypocritical the question is. "Why should I have to be honest when you aren't!?" She demands fiercely.

"Ella "I growl, a clear warning.

"No! You've kept things from me over and over again in the name of protecting me, and you went back to your ex after promising that there was nothing between you." She accuses. "Last night probably wasn't even the first time! How long have you been sneaking around with her, Dominic? Has everything that's happened since I got pregnant been some scheme you two orchestrated to get an heir and win the campaign? Did you arrange the switch at the sperm bank to send all this into motion? What are you planning once the baby comes? Are you just going to steal my child and kick me to the curb?"

I reel back, shocked by the depth of her mistrust. My wolf's jubilation over her jealousy disappears immediately. He whimpers pitifully, devastated to see her so miserable – so undone by fear and betrayal. No, this isn't right! Fix it!

She can't honestly believe any of those things are true, can she? Are these tears that have been

building up in her all along? Or is she simply spiraling because of the perceived lie? She's had trust issues from the day we met, and it pains me to think she might have been tormented by such paranoia, but I could also understand how her baggage might turn one trigger into this maelstrom. I want to tell Ella these ideas are absurd, I want to insist that she'd have to be mad to believe these things, but I know that won't help anything.

"Ella." I say firmly, "Look at me."

"I don't want to." She snaps, stubbornly turning her head away from me.

"I'm not asking." I clarify severely, waiting for the power in my voice to do its work. Slowly she obeys, turning her head back and lifting her blazing, terrified eyes to mine. I press my hand to her belly, letting her feel the solid weight, praying my warmth will bleed through her skin and into her bones. "I didn't lie to you, Ella." I state evenly, "I know you don't want to talk about it, but "

To my amazement, flames blaze to life behind Ella's eyes, and she slams her hands over her ears, glaring at me with so much hurt and animosity that the gesture no longer seems childish. A world of pain and betrayal swirls in her brilliant irises, and I remember that she's not only a woman who's been deeply scarred by her past, but also one who is battling a thousand raging hormones. Exhaling heavily, I remove my palm from her tummy in order to pull her hands away from her ears. As soon as I

do, her eyes fill with tears, and I realize how afraid she is of having her fears confirmed.

“I didn’t lie to you.” I repeat, deciding that this will have to do for now. “When you’re ready to listen to me, I’ll explain everything, but right now I need you to know that everything that has happened since we met has been completely real. I didn’t have anything to do with the switch at the sperm bank, and I was just as shocked by it as you were. Sweetheart, you remember how angry and unreasonable I was at the time.” I remind her, biting back a smile. “I couldn’t fake that if I tried, nor is it how any sane human would act if they wanted to draw someone into a trap.” I forge on. “I am not, under any circumstances, going to keep Rafe from you. He came from each of us, and he belongs with each of us. I know I hid some things from you, but I haven’t ever deceived you about my feelings, and I haven’t been sneaking around with Lydia or anyone else.”

Little by little, my words sink in. I can see the change in Ella’s posture as she slowly deflates, unwinding the tension from her muscles with every sentence I complete. Of course, the more she unwinds, the closer she comes to falling apart. Soon her tears are falling freely, and she looks utterly ashamed of herself. “I’m sorry, I know I’m being crazy.” She hiccups. “I don’t even know why I said those things. I think I’m losing it.”

“Jealousy can do that to a person.” I tease gently, reflexively pulling her closer, trying to draw her into my lap.

Ella’s little body goes stiff with outrage, and she pushes my hands away. “I’m not jealous!” She repeats, though her exclamation sounds more like a whimper now.

“Tsk, of course not.” I sympathize, overwhelming her struggles and scooping her up. She doesn’t come easily, but I gradually trap her defiant limbs until she’s completely bound in my arms. I

purr softly, and though I know she doesn't want to submit, soon I feel her tearstained face pressing into the curve of my neck, and her pert nose breathing in my scent. "Though it's too bad."

"Why?" Ella demands grumpily, sniffing as she snuggles closer. Petulant as she's feeling, she

leans into my touch as I pet her disgruntled form and nuzzle her hair. Her delicious aroma fills my senses, and I feel like I can breathe for first time all morning. Goddess I needed this. When I realized she was missing this morning, I'd panicked completely. Not only because I feared for her safety, hating the idea of her being unprotected in a city full of wolves, but also because I was afraid that Lydia had broken something in our relationship for good.

When I found Ella at her sister's, furious and lashing out at me like a hellcat, I realized there was still hope. She wouldn't be so upset if she didn't care, but I also hated seeing her so unhappy. My wolf wouldn't be calmed until she was safe in my arms again, not attacking me anymore, but seeking my comfort. Yes, this is the way it's meant to be.

"Because of what it would mean if you were jealous." I murmur, finally answering her.

"That I'm a fool." She suggests bitterly, making me shake my head in exasperation.

"That you have feelings for me." I correct, letting some of my own feelings seep into my tone. My hope and desire, the passion that takes all my effort to contain whenever we're together.

"Oh I'm sure you'd love that." She mutters mutinously. "The big bad Alpha needs all the women to fall at his feet whether he

wants them or not. How amusing for the hopeless little human to
”

Before she can continue, I shut her up – claiming her mouth with my own and stealing her ability to speak another word.

#Chapter 90 – Feelings

Sinclair

Ella is as stiff as a board in my arms, frozen in shock to find my lips suddenly on hers, cutting off her bitter tirade. Of course, that only lasts a moment. As soon as the stubborn creature realizes what I'm about, she begins pushing at my shoulders, becoming increasingly agitated when they won't budge. She squirms and struggles, clearly outraged that I kissed her when she was trying to be angry with me. I can practically hear her objections in my mind you're not playing fair! She would say, shooting daggers with her eyes.

Damn straight I would answer, my thoughts conjuring the conversation our bodies are already having.

I rumble softly, and Ella whines – it's a sweet, plaintive sound as her body tries to resist the pull of desire, but I ruthlessly gobble it up. I show her no mercy, caressing her lithe body and devouring her soft murmurs of protest until she melts against me, slanting her mouth beneath mine in total surrender. She whimpers when she finally gives in, as if she doesn't know why she even bothered trying to fight this.

I can taste Ella's blood from the cut on her lip, and my inner wolf groans with pleasure. Unlike our horror film counterparts the vampire, shifters don't have any interest in consuming blood. But it's inevitable to taste the blood of one's mate when delivering a claiming mark, and the flavor has an undeniably Pavlovian effect.

I may not want the crimson liquid for nourishment, but I certainly crave the taste of Ella's. It's rich and sweet, and instantly has me thinking about how other parts of her must taste.

Ella's salty tears drip onto my questing lips, but though she cries, she also clings to me with all her might. Her arms have locked around my neck, and she's pressing her soft curves against me with an urgency I understand all too well. My tongue slips past her lips as I rearrange her in my arms, guiding her to straddle my lap so that I can feel her plump breasts and beaded nipples against my chest. So that I can slide my hands down to the curve of her bottom and press my hardness into her soft center, to help her move against me and find pleasure – even through the fabric of our clothes.

Ella responds to me so naturally, so passionately. I barely need to apply any pressure to affect her movement. It's as if she's reading my mind, our bodies speaking the same love language, completely in tune with one another. Her fingers slide into my hair, closing around the dark locks as if she's afraid she needs to hold me in place, lest I take my mouth away. I hold her more tightly, letting her feel my strength and purring when a little thump against my abdomen tells me that the baby is awake and thriving.

I could kiss her for a thousand years and never get bored, I realize. Never get tired of her taste, or grow immune to the feel of her beautiful body in my arms. Never want for another.

She's perfect. My wolf agrees. We have to claim her. She's strong enough to handle it.

I won't hurt her. I insist. I'm painfully aware of how delicate she is, how fragile her human form is next to my own. It's enough to make me stop handling her so roughly, suddenly afraid I might break her. Ella growls in protest, that same indignant sound that never ceases to fill my heart with warmth.

You see. My wolf argues. She can take it she needs this too.

I purr in apology, sliding my hand in her long, silky hair and clenching it into a fist, holding her head steady as I continue ravishing her. I steal kiss after kiss from her sweet lips, until they're swollen and red for reasons that have nothing to do with her self-inflicted bite. Our breathing is ragged, and Ella's heart is beating so loudly that I don't have to wonder if it's racing as fast as my own – it is.

The scent of her arousal is impossible to ignore in the small space, and the sensation of her grinding against my arousal is enough to make me fear I might come in my slacks like an inexperienced schoolboy. I groan, dragging my mouth from hers to try and catch my breath. Instead I kiss my way over her jaw and nibble one delectable earlobe, eliciting a sultry moan that makes the hard member between my legs leap with excitement.

Down boy, I think in exasperation. Our first time with Ella is not going to be frantic and rushed in the back of a limo.

Ella pulls away from me then, and I realize she must have been startled by the movement – enough to break out of the haze of lust. Her eyes are red-rimmed and her pupils so dilated that her gold irises are a slender ring around the great black pools. Her skin is flushed bright pink, and her hair disheveled. It's a nearly irresistible sight, one that makes me want to go back on my earlier decision not to claim her. No other man should ever be allowed to see my Ella in this state.

"Dominic, this isn't right." She announces, still trying to catch her breath.

"It feels right to me." I reply, resisting the urge to look down at her heaving bosom to see if her breasts are as flushed as the rest of

her. Instead I pin her with my dark gaze, massaging her nape and willing her to come back into my embrace.

“That’s not the point.” Ella insists, sounding as though she might be on the verge of tears again. “Stop looking at me that way!”

“What way?” I clarify, furrowing my brow with concern. “What is the point?”

“Like I’m a rabbit your wolf wants to eat for dinner.” She exclaims. “And the point is that I’m done letting you jerk me around and toy with my feelings!”

“What feelings?” I question, ignoring the first part of her statement. She’s not wrong – my wolf would undoubtedly like to feast on her, just not in the way she means. Again I know I should clear the air between us, but I’m afraid if I do she won’t confess her true emotions. This misunderstanding has provided me with leverage too valuable to ignore, and I might be an asshole for using it against her, but it’s more important to get to the bottom of this. I’ve suspected that Ella has been holding herself back from me for reasons other than disinterest for some time now, and I’m done letting her get away with it. “I thought you didn’t want to be with me?”

“Dominic, why are you so determined to ask me questions when the answers aren’t important?” She hisses angrily. “You’ve made your choice, that’s all that matters.”

“Just tell me, Ella.” I command, sending some of my Alpha authority into my voice. She might not be a wolf, but her instincts are plenty strong. It might be the baby, or she might just be one of those humans who’s more in touch with their primal selves either way she responds to my dominance as naturally as she breathes air.

Ella shivers as my power washes over her, and I'm amazed to see her fight it. "No!" She bursts out, furious even as she tucks a proverbial tail between her legs. "I don't have to! You might run the world but you can't make me open my heart to you. You can't demand I make myself vulnerable with you that's my decision."

—

My wolf wants to growl at her defiance, but I can hear the hurt and fear in her voice. Damn it. I realize. She's right, I'm being an ass. I want the truth, but I don't want to hurt her to get it. As I ponder my mistake, the car comes to a stop in front of my mansion, sliding into a parking space on the opposite side of the street from the house.

Before I can apologize for letting this misunderstanding persist to serve my own selfish desires, my driver opens the door to allow us out of the car. Ella promptly slides out, and my chauffeur tactfully averts his gaze from her disheveled state. She stomps onto the paved sidewalk, wrapping her arms protectively around herself as she looks from right to left, checking the road is clear before preparing to cross.

I follow suit, exiting the vehicle and going after her. "Ella, I'm sorry." I pronounce earnestly.

She pauses, turning back in the middle of the empty street. "Don't be haven't done anything wrong."

you were right, you

The screech of tires fills the air as a car suddenly emerges from a parking spot a few spaces down from our own. To my horror and disbelief, it accelerates as fast as it can, heading straight towards Ella.

#Chapter 88 – Sinclair takes Ella home

Ella

It was easy to be reasonable when it was just me and Cora.

When my

sister's low, steady voice was talking me through all my misguided rationalizations, I didn't struggle to stay calm, I didn't have to fight a tidal wave of raging emotions too tangled and convoluted to ever sort out. I was able to listen and really interrogate my assumptions, to use logic and reason without getting caught up in my emotions. However as soon as Sinclair appears, all that goes out the window.

Just seeing his handsome face makes me want to burst into tears, and I'm so miserable and furious that I don't know what to do. A sense of utter betrayal slams into me, and for the first time I understand why I was so afraid of being love bombed. He might not have been

manipulating me, but I think I've been falling in love with Sinclair all along – no matter how hard I tried to fight it.

Sinclair's power washes over me the moment he enters the room. He barely pauses to greet Cora, his attention clearly elsewhere as his sharp eyes scan the room, only stopping once they land on me. He immediately crosses to the couch where I'm seated and kneels down in front of me. "Ella," my name is a sigh of relief, and he unwinds my arms from my body so he can look me over, as if he's worried I've somehow been injured in his absence. I try to resist his strength, but he makes a deep rumbling sound and I instinctively surrender. His hungry gaze rakes over every inch of my skin before finally rising to meet my eyes. He takes my face in his hands. "Are you alright?"

Knowing I'm playing with fire and not giving a damn, I shoot him a sulky glare. "What do you care?" I hate myself as soon as the words leave my lips. I sound like such a child.

His brows knit, "That's a no." He assesses gruffly, pursing his lips as if he's internal cursing himself. "I'm so sorry about last night. I can explain-"

"I'm fine." I counter sharply, not wanting him to see how badly I'm hurt. "I don't give a damn what you do or who you see when we're not together."

Sinclair arches one dark brow, leveling me with an expression so stern I want to crawl under the couch and hide. "In that case we can go home and discuss the way you snuck out last night, without

your guards, without letting anyone know where you were going." His powerful hand slides around to my nape, and something deep and primal in my bones curls in on itself. "Not to mention crawling down trellises in the rain, especially when you're carrying precious cargo."

"I don't want to go anywhere with you." I snap, hating to be reminded of how reckless I was with

my

unborn child. "I came to Cora's because I wanted to be with my sister and I'm going to stay here."

"Then

you have a choice." Sinclair informs me, his voice like gravel. "Because I'm not leaving you when you're like this. So we can have this out here, in front of Cora, or we can go home and do it in private."

I glance over his shoulder at Cora, who's currently staring at me as if she's never seen me before. I know I'm behaving like a complete brat, but I can't help myself. Sinclair turns me into someone I don't recognize in times like these, and though part of me thinks it must be

the baby's influence, I'd be lying if I said it didn't feel right. Pushing back against Sinclair seems like the natural thing to do, something the voice in my head is demanding despite my better judgment.

"You need to leave." I growl, a pitiful rumble sounding in my chest.

Sinclair's eyes flash dangerously, and he flashes his fangs, showing me his inner wolf. "Have it your way." The next thing I know his shoulder is digging into my pelvis, and I'm being tipped upside. Before I know it I'm slung over his shoulder like a sack of flour. I yelp in surprise, feeling the blood rush to my head. Before I can hope to orient myself, my hair spills down towards the ground, completely blocking my vision of everything beyond Sinclair's muscular back. 1

"Dominic! The baby!" 1 object, squirming vigorously.

"The baby is perfectly fine." Sinclair promises, locking his arm over the back of my knees to cease my escape attempts. "You, on the other hand..."

"Put me down right now!" I order, kicking my feet into his toned abs and remembering that his body is constructed of pure steel. The pain in my toes only enrages me more, and so I start beating my clenched fists against his firm backside. "This isn't fair, you tyrant!" I snarl, fighting for all I'm worth.

“That’s right, you just get it all out of your system, baby.” Sinclair chuckles, patting my thighs. “But you better believe I’m taking note.”

He carries me out the door and into the elevator, letting me vent my rage with so little reaction I wonder if he even notices my attack. “Can you even feel this, you ogre!” I exclaim. “Like ferocious little mosquito bites, sweetheart.” Sinclair taunts, earning himself another outraged snarl. Of course, the big wolf only laughs. He carts me out of the building and onto the street, where anyone can see us.

“Dominic, people will see!” I object, stilling my movements for the first time.

“Then you might want to stop making all those adorable little growling sounds. People are going to start searching if they think there’s an angry kitten on the loose.” Sinclair informs me sagely.

“This isn’t funny!” I cry, hating him for making light of my misery. Sinclair deposits me into the back of his limo, and I immediately slide over the seats and try to climb out the other side. Unfortunately Sinclair’s shifter speed gets the better of me again, and I’m dragged back into the car. Furious, I move into the seat across from him, biting down on my lower lip to stop it from quivering and betraying how close to tears I am.

“I don’t think this is funny, Ella.” Sinclair answers, sounding so sober I wonder if this is the same man who was teasing me a moment ago. “This is very serious to me, but I can’t help the way your defiance provokes my wolf any more than you can help feeling provoked by me.” His glowing, emerald eyes are boring into me, piercing straight through me with so much intensity I can’t doubt his honesty. “And I admit, I find you too cute to bear when you get riled up this way... but I don’t find anything about the situation we’re in amusing

I cross my arms over my chest, and suddenly I taste blood I guess I was biting myself too hard, and now of course Sinclair is beside me, tsking and tugging my crimson stained lip from the prison of my teeth I pull away from him, not wanting to be soothed and coddled when I'm still so furious. Sinclair's jaw clenches, but he lets me go "Ella, If you stopped

fighting me for a minute I could tell you what happened."

"You might be able to bully me physically, but you can't make me listen to you." I snipe. Whatever it is you want to say – I don't want to hear it."

More like you're afraid to hear what he needs to tell you. The little voice in my head observes.

So what if I am? I counter. It's not like it will change anything. The writing is already on the wall. I don't need him to tell me how he thought he was over Lydia and didn't realize he wasn't until it was too late. I don't want to listen to his apologies or promises he can't keep, about how this doesn't have to change our plan.

Maybe not, but you could at least try to be less petty about it.

She has a point. I don't know why I get this way with him, I never suffered from immaturity before meeting Sinclair.

You never had the option before. My conscience reminds me. You always had to be the up in every situation you were in.

grown

Then I should be able to act like one now. I think miserably, even though I know it's a losing battle. I'm about to be a mother. I can't regress just because I got my feelings hurt.

Sinclair is still watching me, and I fight the instinct to squirm under his scrutiny. I take a few deep breaths, trying to work myself up to an apology for my behavior, but unsure how I can word it without also opening us up to a discussion. Before I can come up with the right answer, Sinclair's familiar bass breaks through my thoughts. "What upsets you more Ella, the way I handled last night, or the fact that it happened in the first place?"

"What?" I reply, feeling my hackles raise defensively. Surely he's not suggesting what I think he is. 1

A moment later however, my pulse begins to race as Sinclair repeats his question, this time cutting right to the heart of the matter. "I'm asking: are you angry, or are you jealous?"

No data found.

No data found.