

Accidental Surrogate For Alpha By Caroline Above

#Chapter 91 – Near Miss

Ella

I'm so focused on Sinclair, I don't even see the car until it's almost upon me.

I'm too stunned to move, not that there's time to get out of the way. The only thing I can do is try to turn my body away from the vehicle, to shield my unborn child from the inevitable. crash.

Time itself seems to slow down, and there's a dull roaring in my ears. My thoughts fly by, and I'm amazed at the logical clarity I'm able to find in a single, split second. I tell myself to go limp, the impact won't be as terrible if my body isn't tense with fear. Isn't that why drunk people often survive car accidents that would be fatal otherwise?

Unfortunately I don't have time to unwind my tight muscles, as soon as I've had the thought a huge weight collides with my back, slamming into me with so much force the breath is knocked from my lungs. I'm spinning, twisting as the wall of iron surrounds me, forcing my feet off the ground. A deafening crash fills the air, though it seems delayed. Haven't I already been hit?

Then I'm being thrust forward, or is it backwards? I'm moving, flying through the air and yet my limbs are completely constrained. My eyes are clenched shut, and the sound of wrenching metal and shattering glass explodes around me. It's all so sudden, I don't have time to be afraid, to say prayers for my baby, if not for myself.

I wait for the pain, but it doesn't come. After a few moments of holding my breath I realize I'm not moving anymore. Am I dead? Was it so sudden that I didn't feel it?

I peek open one eye, and sunlight blinds me. Is there a sun in the afterlife? I know shifters have a version of heaven, but I didn't imagine humans got to go there.

There's a click, like a car door opening, and then the sound of racing footsteps. "Catch them!" Sinclair's deep voice snarls, so loud that I think he must be yelling in my ear.

Hope courses through my veins. If he's here then I must not be dead. And why am I so warm? I wonder belatedly, imagining myself sprawled over the hood of a vehicle, in too much shock to feel the impact on my broken body. Shouldn't a car that's been sitting in the snow be cold?

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"Ella Ella, are you alright?" Sinclair is talking again, and I open my other eye, anxious to see him. Instead I see the empty street in front of me. "Please say something." He begs, his gentle hands moving over my body from behind. "Are you hurt? Talk to me baby."

Behind me. I think dazedly. But that means... I sit up, truly looking around for the first time. We're sitting on the hood of the car at least what used to be the hood. Sinclair's huge body has completely totaled the vehicle. Slowly infuriatingly slowly, my brain pieces together what must have happened. Sinclair had been fast enough to reach me, but he hadn't had time to push me out of the way. Instead he'd turned me away from the car and wrapped his own body around me, shielding me from the impact of the car. He'd taken the full force of the crash, and his back had

crumpled the bumper and hood beyond recognition, shattering the windshield into a thousand pieces.

I feel nauseous at once, and my body is shaking with fear and adrenaline. "... I..." I clamber off the crumpled metal surface, my knees giving out as soon as my feet hit the ground. I vomit

into the pristine white snow, feeling Sinclair follow me at a pace much too slow for his supernatural strength. I'm afraid to look at him, but he's hovering beside me, surreptitiously running his hands over my body, searching for signs of injury yet trying not to disturb." Stop." I choke, "I'm alright... it's you" I finally turn to face him, horror and guilt washing over me as I take in the damage.

Sinclair is bleeding, and his body must be covered with bruises. The impact would have killed me, and his shifter strength might have kept him alive, but not even an Alpha wolf can walk away from such an accident unharmed. His handsome face is a tight grimace of pain, but I'm not sure he's even registering the sensations. His attention is focused on me, his green eyes scouring my body for signs of harm.

"Oh Dominic," I choke, my voice thick with emotion as I reach towards his battered body. His shirt has been torn to shreds by glass from the windshield, and I can only imagine how mangled his flesh is underneath.

Before I can touch him, I'm distracted by sounds of a struggle in the distance. I follow the sound with my eyes, catching our chauffeur wrestling the homicidal driver to the ground a few meters down the road. He must have tried to make a run for it when the car stalled, unable to simply plow through Sinclair's iron body the way it would have my own. I immediately recognize the driver as one of the rogues who attacked me in the alley, and suddenly my vision turns completely red.

I forget my concern for myself and the baby, I even forget my worry for Dominic. I feel only a flood of vengeful fury, more violent and feral than any I've known before. That rogue hurt Sinclair. He wanted to end my baby's life and would have taken mine in the process, but he actually did hurt Sinclair. He might have taken my baby's father from us both – from the pack that needs him.

"I'll kill him!" I snarl, pushing myself up on shaky legs and lunging towards the rogue.

A steely bar catches me around the waist, pulling me back.
"Woah Ella, come here, let me look. at you."

"No, I want to kill him!" I insist, not recognizing this bloodthirsty woman I've apparently become.

"I do too, trouble, but right now you're more important." Sinclair murmurs in my ear. I can already hear sirens in the distance, loud, shrill, and drawing closer with every moment that passes.

"I'm fine!" I cry, tears spilling from my overflowing lashes. "He hurt you! Let me go so I can make him pay."

Sinclair is purring, but the sound keeps stuttering in his chest, as if the internal engine that fuels his rumbles and growls has been damaged. "I know little one, we'll make him pay, just take it easy."

Sniffing, I stop fighting, turning to face him once he returns my feet to the ground. "You're all bloody." I observe pitifully, wishing I knew how to heal his wounds. "I want to make him. bloody too."

I sound like a petulant toddler, though admittedly a very violent one. Still, Sinclair isn't listening, the stubborn man has his palm pressed to my belly, his eyes scouring me for the hundredth time. "The baby's okay." He sighs, "but I need you to tell me where you're hurt,

Ella.”

Before I can answer, an ambulance skitters to a stop behind the wreckage, and EMT's leap from the back of the vehicle, sprinting over to us. They slow down as they draw near, warily approaching us as Sinclair holds me tightly and begins to growl protectively. “Alpha,” One of the EMT's has his hands up, to show he means no harm. Belatedly I realize the Moon Valley pack's symbol is blazing on the side of the ambulance, marking it as part of a shifter institution.

Of course the shifters got here faster than the humans. I think with relief. And thank goodness, Sinclair's animalistic aggression would have terrified a human-it terrifies the other wolves already.

“It's okay.” The EMT continues. “We just want to help, we won't hurt her.”

Sinclair scents the air, drawing in their aromas and apparently determining them friendly. Gradually he loosens his hold on me, though I can sense how difficult it is for him to do so. Eventually he offers me up for their examination, delivering a menacing warning in the process, “I'm watching you, beta. One wrong move and I'll make you wish you'd never been born.”

The EMT approaches me, still keeping his hands up in clear view. Sinclair paces behind us like an enraged bear, and I try to get my breathing under control. “Luna, where are you bleeding?”

“I'm not!” I exclaim, half-sobbing. “It's all his blood. I'm fine, he's the one who was hit.”

The EMT look up at Sinclair, searching for confirmation and starting to approach him instead.

“No! Look at her first.” He growls, putting all his Alpha authority into the words and making us all shiver in response.

“Dominic, please!” I beg, moving back towards him. “I’m not hurt because you protected me.” I press my palms to his chest, gazing up at him with a pleading expression. “You did your job, we’re safe.” I continue, praying he’ll listen to reason, or at least be triggered into action. by my words. “Rafe and I need you to be okay so you can continue keeping us safe. So we need you to go to the hospital now. We need you to let them help you.”

Sinclair gazes down at me with glowing, uncertain eyes, and I ask one final time. “Please, Dominic.”

#Chapter 92 – Stubborn Alpha

Ella

Sinclair finally agreed to let the EMTs administer emergency care, though it wasn’t

easy. He refused to let me out of his sight, and though he’d tried to maintain physical contact too, the EMTs eventually convinced him to let them strap him onto a gurney for transfer to the hospital. I sat beside him in the ambulance, where he was sprawled on his side, watching me with complete intensity as the EMTs worked on cutting away his clothes.

I stroked his hair as he stoically suffered through their poking and prodding, so he could feel me safe and secure beside him. At first I tried to peek over Sinclair’s broad shoulder to see the damage on his back, but he growled as soon as I broke eye contact, and I decided keeping him calm was more important than discovering the extent of his injuries.

The ambulance can’t seem to move fast enough, and I’m counting down the moments until we reach the shifter hospital. I can see how tired Sinclair is, his eyelids keep drooping, only to snap back open when he realizes he’s falling asleep. I want to help him rest,

but I'm also afraid that if he falls asleep he might not wake back up.

"I'm so sorry, Dominic." I murmur, unable to hold in my feelings any more.

"Why are you sorry?" He responds, furrowing his brow. "You didn't do anything wrong." "You're hurt because of me." I remind him, hiccuping and swiping at my tears with my free hand. "They wanted me not you. Why did you do that!"

"Baby, if they could have gotten to me they gladly would have you're just an easier target." He explains, sounding so steady and sure, even as the EMTs dig into his raw wounds. "And! did it because you and Rafe are a million times more important than me."

"But that's simply not true." I argue miserably. "You can find another mate and have more. babies – "A warning rumble vibrates in his chest, but I ignore it. "But if something happens to you then the entire pack, the entire realm would be in danger. I'm replaceable, you're not."

"I beg to differ." Sinclair growls. "And if you keep talking that way you're going to regret it, little mate."

The EMTs exchange amused glances, and I can feel the corner of my own mouth twitching. "Are you really threatening me when you're tied down?"

"If you think I can't break out of a few flimsy straps you're out of your mind, gorgeous." He answers, sounding strong and ominous right up until he winces in obvious pain.

"Tsk, stubborn Alpha." I cluck, still stroking his hair. "Are you in a lot of pain? Be honest." I add sternly.

“Not nearly as much as I would have been if I’d lost you.” He replies, with utter confidence. My heart swells, but there’s still a knot of pain and confusion tangled at its center. I’m falling in love with this man, so of course I want to hear his affectionate endearments, of course I want him to be alright. But that doesn’t explain away last night. Sweet nothings won’t fix what’s broken between us. I want to ask him where Lydia fits in all this so badly it hurts, but I can’t do that as long as we have an audience.

That mere thought is enough to give me pause. Does he mean any of the things he’s saying, or

is he just putting on a show for the EMTs? And if he does mean it, then how could he be so cold and dismissive last night? Why did he sleep with her?

“What are you thinking?” Sinclair asks, furrowing his brow as he takes in my solemn expression.

“I’m just wondering if it’s safe for you to fall asleep.” I lie, using my thumb to smooth out the wrinkles in his forehead. “You look so tired.”

“He should stay conscious if he can.” The first EMT frowns apologetically. “Just until we know the damage.”

Sinclair smiles at me, though it looks more like a grimace. “I already told you I wasn’t taking my eyes off you, that includes for sleep.”

“We’re almost there.” The second EMT assures me. “He just has to hold on a little longer.”

Of course, when we arrive at the hospital it’s more of the same: Sinclair being impossibly stubborn and overprotective, even though I’m perfectly fine and he’s the one who looks like he’s been put through a meat grinder. Once I can see his back, I

understand that the entire broad surface was shredded by the glass of the windshield, and hundreds of tiny shards are still embedded in his skin. The sight is enough to send me into a fresh fit of tears, and I'm beyond angry with myself for giving into the emotion. I know me being upset will do nothing. but rile Sinclair's wolf further.

Things reach an unfortunate crescendo when they try and take him for x-rays, because of course I can't go with him. They need to assess the internal damage from the blunt force of the crash, and though the logical part of Sinclair realizes that, the combination of so much danger, my upset, and all the strangers around us has his wolf in full control. In the end it takes getting every guard in the hospital to stand watch over me until he comes back from the X-ray, on threat of death if they let anything happen to me. I told him he was being ridiculous, but of course he didn't listen.

When he finally returns we end up caught in another disagreement, with him insisting the doctors and nurses can tend to his back while he's sitting up so he can keep me in his lap, and those of us who still have our sanity intact trying to convince him to lie down. It's a losing battle, and in the end I end up in the bed with him, his huge body draped over me while he pretends not to feel the pain of dozens of tiny tweezers digging into his torn flesh to extract all the shards of glass.

I do my best to distract him, kissing his scruffy cheeks and nuzzling his neck, telling him what a powerful protector he is and guiding his hand to my belly so he can feel the pup.

"I know what you're doing." Sinclair chuckles, catching my lips in his the next time I try to graze them over his jaw. "Such blatant pandering, you ought to be ashamed." He teases.

“It’s not pandering.” I argue, “At least, not entirely. You saved my life today, you saved the baby again. And after I was such a brat to you.”

“You had every right,” He acknowledges, “even if it was a misunderstanding.”

“Misunderstanding how?” I clarify, stiffening slightly. The text message I received the night before was very clear. “You can’t tell me that wasn’t real, Dominic.”

Sinclair waits until the doctors are finished bandaging his back before he answers. They leave us alone, promising to bring the x-ray results soon. Once they’re out of hearing distance, he

sighs. “Lydia drugged me, Ella.” He confesses, sounding completely ashamed of himself. “I was at the pub, I noticed my drink tasted odd and I blacked out. She sent you that text

message. The next thing I knew, I was waking up in her bed.”

“Are you serious?” I demand, sitting up in horror. Of all the possible ways I expected him to explain his actions, I never dreamed of this possibility.

“I don’t have any idea what happened while I was blacked out and she claims we had sex, but I don’t know for sure.” Sinclair continues. “But the point is that I haven’t been lying to you. I didn’t intentionally have sex with her, and I don’t want anything to do with her now more. than ever.”

“Dominic! Why didn’t you tell me?” I cry, outraged that he didn’t say anything sooner. “Why did you let me keep spiraling that way?”

Sinclair catches me in his crosshairs, giving me such a searing look of incredulity that I begin curling in on myself. “Oh.” I squeak,

realizing that he isn't the only one who's been stubborn today.
"Because I wouldn't let you?"

"I tried to tell you repeatedly." He confirms, "You wouldn't hear it."

"I'm sorry." I profess, feeling lousy even though the knot in my chest is already beginning to uncoil. "I just got so worked up."

"I know." Sinclair agrees. "With jealousy."

"I didn't say that." I combat, snuggling into his chest. "I can't believe Lydia did that. What in hell was she thinking? Surely she didn't expect that kind of dirty trick to convince you to take her back?"

When Sinclair ignores my continued denial, I know the truth must be worse than I realize. "She was thinking that if she gets pregnant, I won't need you anymore."

#Chapter 93 – Proper Luna

Ella

Pain.

My first reaction is pain – blistering and hot, like having my body suspended over a pit of flames and slowly roasted. Sinclair won't need me anymore. I'll lose him. For all my resistance, I've become hopelessly attached to Sinclair, and my feelings for him are far stronger than I'd like to admit. The idea of not having him in my life anymore is so excruciating I can't even consider the possibility head-on. I want to run and hide from it, to pretend it isn't real rather than suffer the agony it unleashes.

I breathe through the torment, wondering how much time has passed while I grapple with this news. It feels like hours, but it's probably only been moments. Once the pain passes, there is only

denial. Lydia can't be pregnant. She and Sinclair attempted to conceive a child for one night couldn't possibly give them success when years of trying resulted in nothing more than broken hearts and a failed marriage. Right?

years

Of course, it wouldn't be the strangest thing in the world if they did succeed after all this time. My conscience suggests and she's right. How many stories have I heard over the years from well-meaning friends trying to make me feel better about my own infertility struggles? "Just wait, the day you stop trying is the day you'll conceive." they'd say, or, "sometimes the stress. alone can keep you from succeeding, at some point you just have to let all that go."

They didn't realize how hurtful it was, almost like they were blaming my infertility on me wanting it too badly. They also didn't appreciate that this might be true for some women, but it's completely false for many others. Some women would never conceive, no matter what they did. Still, they might have been wrong to try and placate me that way, but that doesn't mean those cases never happen. Maybe a blacked out one night stand was what it took for Lydia and Sinclair to finally make a baby together.

What if Lydia is pregnant? I think hesitantly. What if she and Sinclair finally achieved the thing which had cost them their marriage? Could a child be enough to repair the damage in their relationship? Suddenly I see a future where Sinclair and his mate have a child while my own pup and I are able to quietly live in the background no more lies, no more fraud. Completely safe.

Wouldn't that be better than this? Even if I'm heartbroken over Sinclair, isn't my baby's safety more important than anything? Won't I always be sick with guilt as long as I'm continuing this fraud? Isn't it right for the pack to have a true Luna?

No! Something feral and ferocious screams up inside me, Sinclair is ours! She can't have him!

That's selfish. I realize, hating the truth even as I recognize its weight. It's selfish to keep him. for myself if it's not right for him, for the pack. This isn't just about me. It's about millions of people who need Sinclair to lead them.

"And if she is pregnant?" I ask, just barely surfacing from the thoughts attempting to drown

"She's not." Sinclair dismisses easily, echoing my initial thoughts. "we don't even know if I slept with her, and even if I did, we tried for years to no avail."

"But what if she is?" I press, needing him to hear me out. "I mean, if she is pregnant, then

you'll have another potential heir, and its mother will be a she-wolf. That's everything you've been looking for. I have to think that a pup with two shifter parents will be stronger than one with a human mother."

"We don't know that." Sinclair digs in his heels, his sharp gaze piercing me. "And you'll make a better Luna than Lydia ever would."

"We both know that's not true." I correct him gently, wanting to slide out of the bed so he can't use his physical proximity to overpower my senses. "Because no matter what I do, I can never be a real one."

"What are you saying?" Sinclair inquires, frowning deeply now.

"I'm saying that if she is pregnant, that might not be a bad thing." I sigh, trying and failing to leave the protective circle of his arms.

“What?” Sinclair growls, with abject disbelief. I’m not surprised by his reaction, because I’m well aware of how strange it is for me to be making this argument. “Ella, you know what kind of woman Lydia is she’s narcissistic and power hungry. In some ways she’s as bad as the Prince.”

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“I know and I’m not saying she isn’t terrible, just that you need a true Luna.” I remark with a weak shrug. “And with you there to keep her in check, her worse nature wouldn’t ever get out of control.”

“Who says I need a true Luna?” Sinclair grumbles, sounding every bit as petty and mutinous. as I must have earlier.

“Says you!” I burst, laughing now. “From day one, Dominic! You’ve been telling me this arrangement of ours is temporary, and only binding until you find a real mate from the first moment we met.”

“Maybe I changed my mind.” He suggests, nuzzling my neck and squeezing me just a bit tighter, as if he’s afraid someone might take me from him. “Maybe I was wrong.”

My heart skips a beat, and butterflies burst to life in my belly. Is that affection all for me? Is he responding to the baby? How is it we’ve built so much intense intimacy between us, and we’ve never done more than kiss?

I decide to test him. “I think Rafe is confusing your instincts, Dominic. It’s easy for you to say this now, but once he’s here with us, I’m going to go back to being just some human you know.”

Testing him, hmm? The little voice in the back of my head interjects. Sounds to me like you're just making excuses to keep him at arm's length.

Unsurprisingly, Sinclair growls at me, making me quake and lean into him for comfort even though he's the one causing my unease. Now that I don't want to be separated from him, of course, he sees fit to put some distance between our bodies. He shifts me to face him on the hospital bed, keeping his legs straddled over either side of the gurney and staring me down with stern disapproval. "That isn't true. I know the difference Ella. You and Rafe are one now, but I don't want you for my Luna because of him I want you because of you.

"But you weren't wrong." I insist, trying not to absorb his compliments. It feels wonderful for him to be speaking this way, but the way I feel doesn't change the situation we're in. "Because it's one thing to deceive the pack and the Alpha council for the greater good because there is no other option. But Lydia being pregnant would give you another option. An honest option, Dominic." I clarify, needing him to understand.

"Is that what you want?" He asks gruffly.

"I want my baby to be safe. I don't want to live a lie." I answer honestly. "And you don't want to perpetuate a fraud like this if you don't have to." I add pointedly.

"So you think I should take her back, after everything she's done?" Sinclair bites, looking furious now.

"If she's pregnant, if there's a she-wolf who can fill this role without lying to the people, you have to choose her." I insist. "Keeping up this deception isn't right, no matter how we feel."

“You still haven’t told me how you feel, you know that?” Sinclair points out, his powerful hands massaging my waist, surreptitiously holding me in place in case I decide to make a run

for it.

“What does that matter?” I ask, not meeting his gaze. “Last night might have changed everything for us. I know it wasn’t your fault,” I offer apologetically. “But things are complicated enough already without adding feelings to the mix.”

“That may be true, but the feelings are there whether we want them to be or not.” Sinclair responds, ducking his head to try and catch my eye.

“I want our son to have two loving parents who can focus all their attention on him, not their own drama.” I counter, still evading an honest answer, but feeling dizzy now that I’m away from him.

“Why would our feelings mean that we can’t focus on our baby?” Sinclair questions, looking strangely blurry around the edges.

“Because it’s already distracting us! We’re talking about feelings rather than the real issue here which is that Lydia might be carrying another heir for you already. How is that supposed to work?” I inquire, I reach out towards one of his muscular arms for support. “Would you stop moving, please?”

There are strange spots in my vision, and I try to blink them away, but they don’t budge. “Ella?” Sinclair’s urgent voice sounds very far away. “Are you feeling okay?”

The last thing I hear before everything goes dark is his frantic call, “I need a nurse over here!”

#Chapter 94 – Bed Rest

Sinclair

When Ella collapses in my arms, I can hardly wait for the nurses to come running. I immediately assume we must have missed some injury from the accident, and I'm instantly furious with myself for letting her talk me into being prioritized by the medical staff.

What was I thinking? I know they checked her out and there weren't any physical marks on her body, but what if it was something internal? What if she somehow hit her head amid all the chaos? Deep down I know that doesn't make any sense, she was completely wrapped in my arms when we collided with the car, but my fear isn't logical. It's sudden and violent and overwhelming.

"It's okay, Alpha." The doctor assures me as they move Ella onto a gurney of her own. "It's probably just the stress. There's been a lot of excitement today."

"She has high blood pressure." I warn, "we've been monitoring it daily, but her OBGYN is worried she's developing preeclampsia."

My wolf is growling and whining at once- impatient for the doctors to help Ella, worried for her health, and hating that anyone else is near her when she's so vulnerable. She looks so young and innocent in her unconscious state- so small and fragile. Her rose gold hair is a shining cascade over the flimsy pillow, still streaked with my blood. I stay beside her even after the nurses try to order me away. "I'm not going anywhere." I insist, battling my guilt over whether this is all my fault.

Would she have been so overwhelmed if I hadn't needed her to keep me calm? If I hadn't been such an ogre with the EMTs and the doctors, would she have been free to relax and recover without added stress?

At once, I think about her comments regarding Lydia. On one hand I know she's right, continuing our fraud when there's an honest option changes things completely from a moral standpoint. But beyond morality, if there was a way to protect Ella from all this stress and guilt, from the threats posed by the Prince and being my Luna, shouldn't we pursue that? I've been justifying our arrangement on the grounds that becoming King is the only way to make the pack and my family safe, so the threats she's facing to help me win the crown are necessary. But that won't be true anymore if Lydia conceives.

Should I be trying harder to find a she-wolf to become my Luna? Not for the campaign's sake, but for Ella and Rafe's?

It's not that simple. My wolf insists. The pack aren't going to accept you throwing over Ella for Lydia. You've been doing everything in your power to make them fall in love with the human and it's worked.

That's not because of me. I remind him., stroking Ella's hair as the nurses take her vital signs and hook her up to an IV. She made them love her all on her own, just by being herself.

And Lydia made them hate her by being herself. He argues. If you come forward and tell them you've decided to take Lydia back, it could cost you the campaign, whether she's breeding or not.

You may have a point. I acknowledge.

I don't just have a point, I'm completely right and you know it. He replies haughtily.

Fine. I concede, feeling exhausted by this debate, but that doesn't mean it has to stay that way after the campaign is over. Ella deserves to have whatever life she wants if that's a quiet.

existence with our pup out of the public eye, then I want to give that to her, even if it means letting Lydia or someone else be Luna after I'm King. That was the original plan, remember? It's not her fault I got lost along the way.

But you're not the only one who's gotten lost along the way. My wolf argues. Think about how jealous she was, how upset she became over the idea that you'd been with another woman. That has to count for something.

"Dominic?" Ella's soft murmur wrenches me from my thoughts. I breathe an instant sigh of relief how long had I been holding my breath? It doesn't seem fair that such a small, harmless creature can tie all my insides into knots the way Ella can. She thinks she's powerless. I muse, standing to lean over her bed, yet there is no one on earth who has ever had so much power over me.

The doctors had declared Ella dehydrated, stressed and hypertensive, but otherwise unharmed, leaving me to brood over my thoughts while I waited for her to wake. Her OBGYN is on his way in, but until he arrives, we're alone.

"You naughty girl." I tease, stroking her soft cheek. "Fainting to get out of telling me your feelings?"

"It wasn't on purpose." She pouts, looking over me with obvious concern. "Why are you out of bed? What about your x-rays?"

"Don't worry about me, sweetheart." I encourage, "how are you feeling?"

"Sort of hungover." She admits, trying to sit up. I gently catch her shoulder, keeping her in place. Eventually she huffs, "Dominic, I have to pee."

"Well why didn't you say so?" I'm still smiling at her like an absolute idiot, so relieved that she's awake and talking to me that

my tormented thoughts have taken a backseat for now at least. I scoop her up into my arms, unhooking her IV so I can take her to the restroom.

Ella squeaks, holding her hands crossed over her chest as if she's afraid to touch me. "What are you doing!? You're hurt, you shouldn't be doing this!"

"Don't worry, trouble. I heal fast." I assure her, glaring at the nurses we pass, each of whom look as though they'd like to chastise me as well. They all cower beneath my forbidding glower, and a fresh wave of amusement passes over me as I think about how much harder it is to intimidate the human in my arms.

"Not that fast." Ella insists, gnawing on her lower lip and seeming to forget the cut she gave herself earlier until her sharp little teeth dig into the wound. She gasps with pain, so I tsk and purr.

"If you keep that up I'm going to have to find some way to keep your lips occupied so you can't keep biting yourself." I intone darkly, realizing too late that this might have sounded even more lascivious than I intended.

Ella doesn't seem to mind. Her heart thumps loudly against her ribs, and her pupils dilate with interest. Luckily if there is one thing that can kill a mood quickly, it's a bathroom. I deposit Ella on the toilet and calmly weather her glares and admonishments until I finally leave her to

take care of things in private, making her promise to call for me when she's done. Instead I hear the commode flush and the sink running, so I push the door open to glare at her, "Ella you're a fall risk."

“And you’re an overprotective ogre.” She counters, drying her hands and climbing back into my arms so willingly that my wolf completely melts. Indeed, she comes to me so sweetly have to fight to maintain my stern demeanor, reminding myself that I musn’t coddle her, no matter how tempting.

“Do you think that just because I’m injured and you’re in a delicate condition I’ll let you get away with defying me?” I rumble in Ella’s ear, chuckling when she shivers in response.

“How long have I been asleep?” The brazen creature asks, ignoring my question.

“About half an hour.” I inform her, “and my x-rays did come back while you were out. I’m going to be fine.”

“Good.” She breathes, sounding as though a huge weight is leaving her shoulders.

“You were really worried, weren’t you?” I inquire, settling her back in her bed.

“How could I not be?” Ella asks in return, blinking up at me with wide eyes. “I mean, I know you’re strong, but that car... it’s a miracle you’re not more hurt after an accident like that.” “I’m fine.” I promise, dropping a kiss to her hair. “You don’t have to worry about me, Ella.”

She shoots me a challenging stare. “I’d like to see you take your own advice.”

flash my fangs at her, but the OBGYN interrupts us, “Knock, knock.” He says, peaking around the curtain surrounding our ER bay. “I hear you two have been causing some real chaos among the nursing staff here, defying all the hospital’s protocols.”

“I’m innocent.” Ella immediately announces, pointing at me. “It was all him.

I throw my head back and laugh, ignoring the pain which ricochet’s down my back. “Oh you’re really determined to dig yourself into a hole aren’t you, baby?” I remark ominously, stroking, her nape.

“I’m just being honest.” She shrugs, a mischievous glint in her eye..

“Well I think it’s safe to say you’ve had more than enough excitement for the time being.” The doctor shares, giving us a reluctant frown. “I’m afraid we’ve reached the point where you need to go on bed rest, Ella.”

#Chapter 95 – Returning the Favor

Ella

“Bed rest?” I repeat, glancing nervously at Sinclair. “You mean until the baby comes?”

“No, I don’t think we have to do anything quite that extreme yet.” The doctor replies with a kind smile, “For now let’s start with a few weeks. Beyond that we can take it as it comes.” “What does that mean exactly?” Sinclair inquires, his large body looming over me. His heat, which sometimes reminds me too much of a blazing furnace when we’re curled in bed together, is a welcome balm now, washing over me in a tide of cozy comfort. “She can’t out of bed at all?”

get

“No, it’s not that severe.” The doctor assures us. “Ella can get up to go to the restroom, or move around to switch positions. She can take two short walks every day one in the morning, one in the

evening but no more than twenty minutes and if you find yourself getting tired or overwhelmed before then, you need to stop. Absolutely no stairs or physical exertion though, and no standing for more than twenty minutes at a time for any reason.”

My heart sinks, and I try not to let my disappointment show. It’s not the end of the world. after all, it just means I’m going to be a bit bored. “Do I have to be completely on my back, or is sitting up okay?”

“Choose whatever position is most comfortable for you.” He continues, looking back and forth between us. “More importantly, no stress whether you’re in bed, on the couch, or wherever you choose. That means no campaign events, no excitement.”

“And if she does get excited, despite our efforts?” Sinclair inquires, an odd note in his voice.

“I’m going to send you home with some sedatives in case of emergencies, and while I would advise you keep sexual activity to a minimum, if the tension is building up it’s better to indulge it than to resist just remind your wolf to be gentle with her.”

I blink. Who said anything about sex? Is that what Sinclair was getting at, but I just didn’t understand the nuance? How is that not physical exertion?

Don’t be daft, you know orgasms are the best stress relievers. The little voice in my head remarks.

Oh Goddess, when was the last time I had one of those? I think back, recalling the last night I slept away from Sinclair, when I was finally free to get some relief from the fire he keeps constantly lit inside me.

Too long, and you have to admit it would be nice to have one you didn’t give yourself. The

voice answers.

That would be a first, I snort. Mike is the only man I've ever been with, and he'd never seemed to understand that women can't just magically get off with a few thrusts. I always enjoyed sex for the intimacy, and though it always felt good, orgasms had always been my own responsibility mine to seek once he rolled over and fell asleep.

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You know it wouldn't be that way with Sinclair. My conscience intimates, sparking memories of the few times we've gotten carried away when I've had glimpses of the pleasure he could give me if I would only succumb to his charms. His words the day of the ball after the

incident, as I've decided to call it – ring in my mind: Now, would you like me to make you feel good? Nothing about his own desires, nothing about going further – just a selfless offer to fulfill my needs.

Shut up. I think sharply, unsure whether I'm speaking to the memory or my inner voice. Sinclair is watching me like a hawk, and the hungry expression he's wearing makes me worry that my expression is giving away my lurid thoughts. Before he can say a word, I lean into his side, turning my face towards his shoulder so I can breathe in his scent. I'm doing it for comfort yes, but also to hide my blushing features. Sinclair purrs softly, still stroking my nape, and thanks the doctor.

"I appreciate you coming on such short notice. Can I take her home now?" He asks bluntly, as if I'm the injured party here, rather than him.

“Dominic, you’re in much worse condition than I am.” I remind him sulkily. “We should be asking your doctors, not mine.”

He raises one dark brow at my challenge, but otherwise doesn’t acknowledge my words. He looks back to the OB, who smiles warmly, “she’s free to go as soon as I write this prescription. I’ll come and check on her the day after tomorrow, but call me if anything comes up before then.”

“Oh fine, ignore me, talk about me like I’m not here.” I grumble. “That will keep me calm.” “Don’t worry Ella, you’re in good hands.” The doctor replies, completely unphased by my petulant words. “I’ll see you soon.”

The moment he turns away, Sinclair moves in front of me, sliding his muscular arms around my middle and burying his face in my neck. I’m so surprised by the gesture, that I barely notice I forgot to thank the doctor. Sinclair isn’t growling, or scolding me, he’s not even kissing me or trying to sneak an intimate caress, he’s simply hugging me – squeezing me with barely restrained force.

Sensing that this isn’t his usual mischief or bossiness, I wrap my arms around his broad shoulders, returning the embrace and nuzzling his scruffy jaw. “Hey, what is it?” I murmur, holding him as tightly as I can so that he knows I’m asking out of concern, not some desire to be released. It’s only when I feel the bandages beneath his shirt that I remember his wounds, but as soon as I try to take my arms away, Sinclair rumbles in protest.

He lifts his face from my neck, only high enough to speak into my ear. “Today was horrible.” He says, his voice like gravel, “every last minute of it. And now this.”

“I’m okay, though.” I answer softly. “And so is the baby this is just a precaution.”

“I don’t like it.” He insists, sounding as sullen as I was feeling a few minutes ago. “You shouldn’t have to worry about this on top of everything else... and I hate that I can’t... I can’t protect you from this.”

And here I thought I was the one on a roller coaster of emotions. In a matter of a few hours, Sinclair had gone from rabid protector, to bossy nurse, and teasing, would-be lover. Now here he is, clinging to me like a child might cling to a teddy bear, beside himself with feelings of helplessness in light of my condition. I suddenly realize that his day started off even worse than my own waking up drugged with a psychotic ex, then finding me missing, tracking me down and weathering a tantrum he did not deserve.

“I’m sorry.” I tell him, my voice sounding smaller than I’d like. “I’m sorry for the way I acted

earlier, and I’m sorry I scared you when I ran, and with the accident, and fainting that way. I wish I could turn back time and undo this entire day and yesterday for that matter.”

“It’s certainly been an eventful week.” He jokes, his deep bass dripping with irony. “But none of it has been your fault.”

“I’m still sorry.” I repeat, kissing his neck. “You’ve been killing yourself taking care of me, and I’ve been a brat. You deserve better.” I hate that I’m near tears already, but I don’t think my wild emotions are going to even out any time soon. “I think it’s time you let me return the favor.”

“You already did.” He purrs, rocking me ever so slightly as he strokes my hair. “You kept me calm today when no one else could. You probably saved the lives of some of these nurses.”

At first I take it as a joke, but after more thought I realize he's probably being completely literal. "It's not enough, I want to do more."

"You just got put on bed rest, little one." Sinclair reminds me, pulling back to take my face in his massive hands. Despite his stern tone, his green eyes soften as he looks down at me. "I appreciate that you want to help me, Ella. But the only thing that could possibly fix this would be for the doctor to walk back over here and tell me his diagnosis was a mistake. I'm afraid I'm going to be feeling this way until our baby is here and you're both safe and healthy."

"You're right" I acknowledge, clasping his wrists and giving him my best puppy-dog eyes. "I can't fix this, but there must be something I can do to make you feel better even on bedrest" I plead, a devious thought occurring to me then. "You know I won't be able to truly relax if I'm worried about you."

Sinclair huffs out a laugh, closing his eyes and shaking his head. "I swear, you're going to be the death of me, trouble."

I peek up at him from beneath my lashes. "Is that a yes?"

#Chapter 96 – Ella and Sinclair Reach an Understanding

Ella

"Why does it feel like this is more for my benefit than yours?" I inquire archly, watching as Sinclair pours oils and salts into a large, steaming bath. The clever wolf knows how much I love a bubble bath, especially now that I'm pregnant. After years of constantly being dirty and even living on the street, there is nothing else that feels so luxurious to me and I can't think of anything more relaxing.

“Hey, I was going to get in with you you’re the one who put your foot down.” Sinclair replies with a wolfish grin, skimming his fingers through the water to check the temperature.

“Because you have open wounds!” I exclaim, exasperated but also impatient for the preparation to be over so I can sink into the deep tub. “The doctors said you couldn’t submerge your injuries until the scabs are gone.”

Amazingly, the gashes on his back have already scabbed over. It seems that he truly wasn’t lying when he told me that shifters heal faster than humans, but I hadn’t expected him to heal quite so fast. At this rate his wounds will be mere scars in a couple of days.

“Which is why I’ll be supervising, not participating.” Dominic shrugs, I wonder if that hurts. him? I ponder, watching the muscles rippling in his back. He certainly doesn’t show any signs of pain.

He’s so strong. My traitorous conscience moons, and for a moment I actually think I see stars in my eyes.

Rolling my eyes at my inner voice, I cross my arms over my chest. “The idea was to help us both relax.” I sigh, guilt gnawing at my insides.

“Believe it or not, Ella, but taking care of you does help me relax.” Sinclair declares coolly, pressing a button that triggers the whirlpool jets built into the tub. A steady thrumming sound whirs to life as the water begins to churn, foaming and bubbling even higher now.

“Oh sure, I’m sure your version of supervision will ensure neither of us get the least bit excited as you and the doctor so elegantly put it.” I snark.

The big wolf flashes his fangs, flames dancing in his eyes as he finally turns away from the bath. “If I didn’t know any better I’d think you were worried about losing control with me.” He observes darkly, “but I can’t imagine why that would be, unless of course your feelings for me are stronger than you’re letting on.”

“Now you’re just fishing.” I accuse, narrowing my eyes at Sinclair, even as he prowls toward me across the tiled floor.

“Am I?” His dark brows incline towards his hairline. “Because I have no problem admitting mine.”

“Don’t!” I interrupt, feeling a sudden spike of panic. “Seriously Dominic, whatever you’re going to say, I don’t want to know.”

“I thought we were past that, sweetheart.” He scolds, “didn’t you learn your lesson about actually hearing me out when I want to tell you something

“This is different.” I insist, “it honestly stresses me out.”

Sinclair pauses, studying me closely. He’s only a few paces away now, but the longer he observes me, the softer his ravenous expression becomes. “Has it occurred to you that part of the reason you’re so stressed is because you’re trying to fight the inevitable, Ella?”

“Dominic, what stresses me out is bringing a wolf pup into a world I don’t belong to or understand, while living a lie and dodging constant death threats.” I snap, before I can consider how the Alpha might take my words. “Can you really blame me for wanting to keep things simple in the face of all that? If we lose focus for even a moment, this could all fall

apart.

He stops dead in his tracks, and I can see a great wall of guilt slam into him. I know he's not focusing on my logic, but on the blame I've basically just foisted upon him. "Wait... that came fault out wrong." I try to backtrack. "Dominic, I didn't mean that any of this is your "You might not have meant it that way, but you weren't wrong." Sinclair declares gutturally, his face a full shade paler than it was a moment ago. "It is my fault if I were a normal man, I hadn't forced you into this situation, you probably wouldn't have any complications at all." "No." I object, my voice thick with emotion. "You didn't force me into this, Dominic. And there's no way to know whether any of this is connected. Mike destroyed my reproductive system and plenty of healthy women develop this condition -"

"Maybe so," He interrupts sharply, "but our situation certainly isn't making things any better." Sinclair is pacing now, resembling a tiger in a cage.

"Please don't do this." I beg, hiccupping on a sob. "Please don't blame yourself for this. You're trying to do the right thing for everyone here. Neither one of us planned this, neither one of us could have prepared for what the world would throw at us these last few months. I don't blame you, I just don't want things to get more complicated than they have to be."

At the sight, or perhaps scent, of my tears, Sinclair deflates, closing the final distance between us and pulling me into his arms. "I'm sorry." He croons in my ear, stroking my spine and kissing my hair. "I'm sorry, sweetheart. Here I am, supposed to be keeping you relaxed and I'm making you cry."

My feet are still on the ground, but I don't want them to be. I begin clambering up the huge man like a monkey climbing a tree, until my arms and legs are wrapped around him and I'm weeping into

his neck. "It's not your fault." I repeat pitifully. "I cry over everything now."

"Shh," He coos, sitting down on the edge of the bath. "It's okay, you're not going to break me with a few tears, trouble." He says this, but I can hear the pain in his voice, I can still see the horrible expression on his face.

A steady purr takes up residence in his chest as he deftly strips off my clothes. He tries to deposit me in the bath, but I won't let go, afraid that he'll leave if I release him. Instead he manages to pull off his slacks, shirt and boxers without dislodging me, before sinking into the tub with me still in his arms. I try to protest about his back, but he just hushes me and continues submerging us in the hot water.

It's quite some time before my tears slow enough to talk again, and I realize this isn't even the first breakdown I've had today. "I love this baby," I murmur after a while, "but I'm getting really sick of crying all the time."

Sinclair's lips graze my temple. "I don't think that's his fault either. Maybe some of it -"

if

"The bacon." I remind him, thinking of my most ridiculous fit yet.

"The bacon." He agrees, sounding almost amused. "But not the rest. You have every reason to be upset, Ella. I should have listened to you earlier, before you fainted. You tried to tell me this was all too much and I was too preoccupied with romance to really consider how right you were. It's exactly like you said, I'm letting my feelings distract me from what's really important, and that's the campaign. And it's you and Rafe."

“What are you saying?” I sniffle, fearing I know the answer, and unable to decide whether or not I hope I’m right.

“I’m saying I think you were right. If Lydia is pregnant it might be for the best, and if she isn’t I should try to find another she-wolf to be Luna after we get through the campaign.” Sinclair proclaims, his deep voice sounding hollow – almost as if it belongs to someone else.

Luckily I’m still curled around him like a baby sloth, so I hide my face in his shoulder to prevent him from seeing my disappointment. I don’t understand it myself. I know this is the right decision, I know it’s the most logical solution for our problems, and I don’t plan on arguing it but it still hurts. It still feels like I’m being ripped apart from the inside out.

“Thank you.” I breathe, despite my breaking heart. “I’m trying really hard, but I don’t know if I can get through another week like this one with my sanity intact.” I confess, recalling everything that’s happened in such a short time: blackmail, Roger learning the truth, Lydia drugging Sinclair, our fight, the car crash, the hospital, now this. Has it really only been three days?

“Bed rest will help.” Sinclair promises, “just you wait, in a week or so you’re going to be so bored you’ll be wishing for another blackmailer just to shake up the monotony.”

I hiccup a laugh, and finally relax against him as my tears slow at long last.

Of course, after two weeks of bed rest, it’s not a blackmailer awaiting me it’s a text from Lydia. There are no words, only a photo, one displaying the unmistakable image of a positive pregnancy test.

Todave Ro

#Chapter 97- Lydia's Pregnant

"Well, I guess that settles that." I muse, staring at the image dominating the narrow screen of my smart phone. Granted, it was sent by the woman I saved as "Satan's Mistress" in my contacts and is centered right below the photo of Lydia and Sinclair in bed together, but there's no mistaking the sight of a positive pregnancy test.

I've taken enough home tests in my life to understand what the two pink lines filling the small results window mean they're the sight I wished for a thousand times but never saw.

I'm trying to keep the pain and disappointment out of my voice so that Sinclair won't know how upset I am, though I don't know why I bother. It seems he can read me like a book, even at the best of times.

Whether he can sense it or not, I'm devastated to know Lydia is pregnant, that her scheme worked. Even though this solves some of our problems, I hate to think that she's getting rewarded for her duplicity, and I despise the idea of Sinclair starting a family with anyone else

even if it's in my baby's best interest.

"Not yet it doesn't." Sinclair replies, his big body still wrapped around me in our bed. "Not until I know the test is real, and even then it might not be my pup. I wouldn't put anything past Lydia at this point."

"So you have to go see her?" I guess, fighting the strange but increasingly familiar urge to growl.

"Yes." He confirms, not sounding any more excited about it than I am. He shifts my body beneath his, balancing his weight on his elbows. "I'll go by her hotel on my lunch break."

“Are you sure that’s a good idea?” I question, sliding my hands over his muscular chest. What if she tries to drug you again, or pull some other kind of trick?”

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“She succeeded last time because she bribed a waitress to put something in my drink.” He reminds me, sharing the details we learned after his guards investigated the staff at the bar he’d visited that fateful night. “I didn’t know she was anywhere in the vicinity, or I would have been much more careful. I’m not going to let my guard down with her.”

“Fine,” I huff, “but if she lays a hand on you I’m going to rip her head off.” I remark, already fantasizing about doing just that.

“Oh I see,” Sinclair answers, a teasing note in his voice. “So you can rip peoples heads off but I can’t?”

“Yes.” I reply primly, “because in my case it’s just a fantasy, in yours it’s an actual possibility.”

Sinclair chuckles, nuzzling my neck and pausing to nibble the spot where it meets my shoulder. “I bet you could rip off some heads if you really wanted to.” He states, sounding as if the idea pleases him very much. “You should have seen yourself trying to go after the driver who hit me.”

“Well I guess we’ll never know, because you didn’t let me avenge you.” I grumble sullenly.

“Poor, mistreated Ella.” Sinclair croons, shifting to dip his tongue into the hollow of my clavicle. “Not allowed out of bed, not allowed to slaughter your enemies. What did you ever do to deserve such abuse?”

“You tell me, you’re the one holding the keys to my jail cell.” I challenge, arching my chest in a blatant attempt to encourage him downward. Unfortunately or fortunately I suppose, he has enough restraint to resist.

“I promise I’ll take you anywhere you want to go just as soon as the doctor clears you, sweetheart.” Sinclair promises, lifting his head from my body.

“What ever happened to that driver anyway?” I ask, realizing that I was so distracted by my medical condition and Lydia’s scheming that I almost forgot about our would-be murderer.

“We can talk about that later.” Sinclair announces, “I have a few other updates for you, but there isn’t time now.”

I slide my knees up so I can tangle our legs together. I know he’s getting ready to scent mark me, which means he’s also getting ready to leave for the day. However, being stuck on best rest has made me a bit clingy, since I can’t see Sinclair except for the times he’s home.

When he feels my legs wrapping around his own, Sinclair chuckles darkly, sparing one of his hands to stroke the length of my leg. “You trying to stop me from leaving, trouble?” He asks, pausing to massage the muscles in my calf.

“Of course not.” I lie, adopting an innocent expression. “I just like feeling close to you.”

“Mmm, I like being close to you too.” Sinclair professes warmly, kissing my pulse point. “Now be a good girl and let me scent mark you.”

Wanting to stall him, to keep him in bed with me forever, I inquire. “Dominic, if I’m on bed rest then why do you need to scent mark me? I’m not going to be seeing anyone.”

His eyes flash with emerald light, and I know his wolf has risen to my challenge. “We don’t know that for sure, what if some other wolf comes sniffing around the manor?”

“How would they get past all your guards?” I pose, narrowing my eyes with suspicion.

“Mmm, you can never trust wolves.” He declares, his fangs extending in a predatory grin.

“Says the hungry wolf in my bed.” I laugh, trying not to squirm as he drags those fangs over my ear lobe.

“What’s wrong, little human, are you worried I might gobble you up?” Sinclair teases, his voice a low rumble that makes my insides turn to jelly.

“I’m just wondering why I need to smell like you just to lie in bed all day.” I answer, trying to sound nonchalant.

“Because you always need to smell like me.” Sinclair insists, raking his dark gaze over my body with relish. “You’re mine whether you’re in public or private.”

I positively quiver when he claims me for his own, and though my inner feminist wants to be outraged, I can’t deny how delicious it feels to be wanted this way especially by a man such as Sinclair. “Why is it I feel like I’m talking to your wolf right now, rather than you?” I joke, knowing full well that this is exactly the case. From the moment I challenged him about scent marking, his inner animal rose to the surface, pushing the logical man I’ve come to adore into the backseat.

“Baby, my wolf and I are one in the same.” Sinclair reasons, even as he pulls off my night dress and begins to rub his body against mine.

“Maybe, but it’s very obvious when he’s in control. You start acting like a treasure-obsessed. dragon who’s mistaken me for some sparkly trinket.”

Sinclair rumbles in protest, pausing to look down at me with a foreboding expression. “How dare you, you’re so much more than some trinket or trophy, Ella.”

“You know what I mean.” I laugh, rolling my eyes.

“I do,” He concedes, eyes glittering. “but the real question is why you’re delaying something you need just as badly as I do.”

The terrible thing is that he’s right. I’m trying to delay the scent marking because I know he’ll leave once it’s over, but I do need him to mark me. I need to feel his claim on me, to feel the proof that I belong to Dominic Sinclair.

The bigger the baby grows, the sharper my senses become. I can smell Sinclair now, the way only a shifter can. It’s not like with humans, whose aromas are combinations of body odors, soaps and colognes that linger on the skin. Wolf scents are so much deeper than that; powerful essences that exude from the pores and bear strange and mysterious magics. Sinclair’s is all balsam and warm, spiced honey, plus a heady, masculine musk all his own.

I can feel when the strength of his scent fades from my body after a long time apart, and it makes me feel oddly incomplete like I’m suddenly missing a piece of myself. There’s also a primal part of me which wants to ensure he doesn’t go to see his mate the she-wolf who’s carrying another one of his babies without claiming me first.

I’m already fighting a great conflagration of jealousy at the idea that she’s carrying his child. I want to destroy her, I want to

smother him with my own scent before he goes to her, to stake my claim on him so Lydia knows that he's mine no matter what she does.

Suddenly I find myself doing just that. As soon as the thought occurs to me, I find myself rubbing my body all over his, aggressively wriggling against him, determined to cover every inch of his skin in my own essence. Of course, this is much harder for me than it is for Sinclair. He's so large that he can easily wrap himself around me and cover my whole body. I, on the other hand, have to take extra care to ensure I haven't missed a spot. I don't understand what's come over me, it's like I've been possessed by some wild spirit which won't rest until this man bears my mark then again, much of pregnancy feels this way. I don't have any control over what my body does these days.

Sinclair is purring and chuckling at once, both pleased and amused by my wolfish behavior. I pause, shooting him a suspicious glare, "Are you laughing at me?"

Sinclair grins. "I like seeing you like this. So possessive so much ferocity in such a tiny package." His hands are stroking my sides, exploring the curves of my naked body in a sensual dance that is fanning the flames already consuming me. "It's adorable, and incredibly sexy."

I can feel myself flushing, I can also feel a very familiar and dangerous heat pooling in my belly. If we keep this up, we're going to start kissing, and if we start kissing... well, I'm not sure how much longer either of us can hold ourselves back from one another. This thought is enough to finally cool my overheated blood we've agreed to be friends, not to overcomplicate things.

I slump back down onto the bed, throwing my arm over my eyes so I can't see Sinclair's handsome face or rock hard body. "You should go." I sigh, trying to be strong. "This is getting

out of hand.”

There’s a long beat of silence, but when Sinclair speaks again I know he must have reigned in his own desires, recognizing the slippery slope we were headed down. “I’m sorry, Ella.” His weight lifts from the bed, and I feel his soft lips graze mine, “I’ll call you as soon as I’ve seen Lydia. And if you can promise to try and be less irresistible, I’ll promise not to go telling you how much you turn me on. Deal?”

I can’t help but laugh, moving my arm so I can see his sultry smile, “deal.”

#Chapter 98 – Sinclair Visits His Ex

Sinclair

When I arrive at Lydia’s hotel, I’m still thinking about Ella.

We’ve been doing well over the last two weeks, keeping our relationship affectionate but resisting our shared desires as best we can. So far we’ve been able to avoid getting more intimate than we’d already become before the doctor ordered bed rest, but the sexual tension is still building – and the suggestion that Ella could be less irresistible is nothing short of ridiculous.

What’s more, the baby is making her more wolf-like every day, and I’m worried our restraint can’t last much longer. Her efforts to scent mark me today made that only too obvious. Before long she’s going to start pushing me like any she-wolf denied her needs, either challenging my dominance or seducing me outright. It will be up to me to resist, even though denying her needs goes against my every instinct.

I know we made the right decision about staying just friends, especially since I’ve already let my attraction to Ella distract me from the campaign more than once. I was so preoccupied with the

beautiful human that I missed rogues pouring into my borders, and it cost the pack. dearly. I got drugged and apparently bred like a prize stud because I was too busy gushing about her to a pack of bar flies than keeping my guard up.

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None of that is to mention the harm I'm doing to Ella and our baby by keeping her in this fraudulent political game. I need to confirm Lydia's pregnancy or find another Luna and whomever I choose would never accept me having a relationship with Ella in private. That means we have to find a way to be together without romance getting in the way, and so far we're failing. I'm failing her again.

I knock on the door of Lydia's room, trying to push down memories of the last time I was here. I can't decide how I feel about this supposed pregnancy. On one hand, the last thing I want is to have Lydia back in my life. On the other, a baby born from her would solve some of my problems the pack would accept me returning to my fated mate more easily than they would understand me leaving Ella for another woman.

Still, I can't help but thinking the best solution to all this would be to find a she-wolf to be Luna after the campaign, and to keep Rafe as my heir. That way we avoid Lydia's awfulness, while still giving Ella the safety and comfort she deserves.

my

Before I can consider the idea further, the door swings open, revealing Lydia in a hotel bathrobe. She's wearing a knowing smirk, and her dark hair is still wet from the shower. Dominic, I've been expecting you." She preens, dropping her hand to her belly. "Or should I call you Daddy?"

My wolf

gags in my head, and I can't blame him. It amazes me to know how attractive I once found this woman. The idiocy of youth, I suppose, and the cruel tricks of fate.

I promptly scent the air, pushing past the fragrant soaps and shampoos lingering on her skin. I can smell her familiar, distinct aroma: the cloying combination of lemon and pine. At one time it had smelled natural and fresh to me, now it just reminds me of floor cleaner I can't smell a pup in her womb, which doesn't mean she isn't breeding, but it does mean the child doesn't belong to me.

I could smell Rafe from down the hall when Ella was only ten days along, but it's been two weeks since the apparent conception and I can't detect a single hint of my own essence in Lydia.

"Nice try, Lydia, but if you are pregnant, it's not mine." I announce, overflowing with triumphant glee.

"What. How can you say that!?" She exclaims. "I'm not some slut, Dominic, I don't sleep with just anyone."

Belatedly I realize she must not understand how quickly the bond between a father and pup forms. She probably thought she had plenty of time to figure out how to pass off the child as mine, or to conceive one for real.

"Darling, having never been pregnant, you couldn't possibly know this," I state coldly, watching her flinch at my cruel phrasing and imagining Ella scolding me for intentionally targeting her weak spot. "But if you were carrying my child, I would be able to smell it. Even now."

Lydia's mouth opens and closes as she struggles to find the right words. "Are you sure about that?" She finally challenges, "you wouldn't want to risk being wrong about something so important."

I stalk forward, rudely reaching for her middle and uncinching her robe. I press my palm to her stomach, telling myself that she deserves this and more. After all, this is nothing compared to drugging someone and sleeping with them when they can't consent. Again I feel. nothing, no pulse of life, no tiny consciousness or connection. "I'm sure." I proclaim fiercely. "As soon as the egg implants, the bond to the father forms. If you are breeding, it isn't mine."

Her hands close into fists, and she bares her fangs. "Goddess damn it!" She explodes, wrenching her body away from me and yanking her robe closed. "If you had just cooperated. from the beginning -"

"Wait," I interrupt. "What do you mean, if I had cooperated?"

She growls, throwing her hands up in exasperation. "Do you have any idea the lengths I went to in order to drug you, Dom? To get you back here? That was supposed to be the hard part but of course, you never make anything easy! You were out of your head on GHB, and still all you could think about was that little whore of yours! You didn't want anything to do with me, you kept going back and forth between gushing over how wonderful she is and asking for her, trying to leave so you could go find her. I had to practically tie you down just to keep you here, and then nothing I tried got you even a little aroused I should have shown you her photo, I'm sure you would have been hard in an instant!"

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"So we didn't even have sex?" I clarify, relief coursing through my veins.

“Are you kidding? Your cock was like a limp noodle!” She bursts out, glaring at me. “I swear, that bitch must be a witch. I’m still your fated mate, I ought to be able to turn you on if nothing else.”

“What can I say?” I shrug, feeling very smug now. “Now that my wolf has gotten a taste of Ella, you can’t expect him to settle for anything less – and you are absolutely, unequivocally less, Lydia.”

Her eyes blaze, glowing with her inner wolf. There’s anger reflected in her dark irises, but also

a world of pain. “Of course I am. How many times did you even fuck her before she got

pregnant? Once? Some sluts just open their legs and magically conceive, while the rest of us struggle for years.”

“You don’t know Ella.” I growl. “It wasn’t like that, and it hasn’t been easy for her.” For one moment, I allow myself to feel for her, for this she-wolf who I spent so many years trying to make a family with. Our disappointment and failure was shared for so long, at a time when we both felt like our bodies were betraying us neither able to fulfill their core function of procreation. I’ve moved past that now, but I know Lydia is still living it. “It’s not your fault that we couldn’t get pregnant, and I would never never blame you for that.” I begin.

Tears well in Lydia’s eyes, and she interrupts me before I can continue.. “You say it’s not my fault, but the truth is that it was. You knocked Ella up without even trying, didn’t you? That means that I was the problem all along.”

“I’m sorry, Lydia.” I profess, surprised to find I mean it. “But that’s not why she’s better. The difference is that Ella is good and kind, and she only ever wanted to be a mother because she has so

much love to give not because it was a way for her to secure power. I know that doesn't make failing easier, but Ella is truly worthy of being a Luna because she will selflessly sacrifice herself for her people or her family, and you never would."

"I don't need to be pregnant to ruin you." Lydia threatens, tears spilling down her cheeks. "If the pack finds out you spent the night with me it won't matter they'll turn on you all the same."

Something truly bitter enters his voice now, and I suddenly realize the depth of her hatred for Ella. "She won them over so easily. She just batted her lashes and they fell at her feet, just like you. They'll take her side if the story comes out, even though you've been Alpha for years."

"So what? You're going to hold a press conference?" I growl.

"I'll leak the story to the papers." She corrects me fiercely. "And they'll believe me, because I have the photographs. I have proof. I'll end your campaign once and for all."

#Chapter 99 – Sinclair Tells Ella

Sinclair

My wolf is clawing at the surface of my skin, determined to be let out so he can tear Lydia to shreds. Gritting my teeth, I narrow my eyes at the malevolent she wolf. "Lydia, you are the second person who has attempted to blackmail me this month, and I have to tell you – this is getting really old."

Rolling my eyes, I continue. "And you seem to be forgetting that I'm on the board of the Moon Valley associated press. I hold shares in every major publication in the city. What's more, none of the outlets want the Prince to win the campaign, because if he does the free press disappears."

Lydia snarls, throwing her hands up, “fine, then I’ll simply text it to every person I know! It will get around that way!”

“And I’ll refute it.” I inform her coldly. “I’ll say it’s an old photo from when we were married, and the pack will believe me, because you are a traitor who abandoned them.” As I speak, I scan the room for her phone. If I refute her story, it’s true that the pack will probably side with me, but I honestly don’t want to risk it..

I finally see her device, lying on the hotel bed’s pristine white coverlet. Straightening up to my full height, I stride closer to Lydia, towering over her. “You’ve gone too far this time, Lydia.” I declare, backing her into the wall. “I’m going to let you walk away, but you have to go now. Leave Moon Valley by sunset, and don’t come back.”

“Or what?” She mutters bitterly, tears still hovering on her lashes. “You’ll kill me?”

“You aren’t my mate anymore.” I remind her, “And you never deserved to be in the first place. I will kill you if you make me, but it doesn’t have to be that way. Go back to your husband, adopt a child if that’s what you want, but stay the hell away from my family.”

Lydia shakes her head, still full of defiance, even as the scent of her fear grows stronger with every moment that passes. “I don’t believe you. I don’t believe you’d actually harm me.”

With an abundance of control, I close my fist around her throat, glowering down at her and letting her feel the full force of my rage. “You took my brother from me, for more than a decade.”

I remind her. “You saw fit to ignore fate until you thought you could benefit from it, and you blamed our fertility struggles on me for years.” My voice is barely more than a snarl, and though I no

longer feel insecure about this particular slight, it doesn't change the hurt it inflicted at the time.

I press on, watching the panic grow in Lydia's eyes as her air supply is abruptly cut off. "You left when the pack needed a strong Luna most. You have endangered everyone in Moon Valley with your selfishness, you cleared the way for a Tyrant to claim the throne. You drugged me, tried to steal my sperm, and on top of everything else, you made my Ella cry."

I hiss, amazed to discover my wolf finds this as offensive as Lydia pushing the pack to the brink of war. Of course it was more than just tears, Ella ran away because of Lydia's tricks, she might have been killed if I hadn't found her so quickly. "The only reason you're not dead already is because you were my mate, but that protection is gone now.

I release her abruptly, moving to the bed and snatching up her phone while she remained huddled against the wall, gasping for air. "You have until sunset, Lydia. After that, all bets are off."

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I storm out of the room, not pausing to look back. I don't need to I can hear Lydia's back sliding down the wall so she can huddle on the floor, sobbing out her pain and fury. Once upon a time the sound of my fated mate so distraught would have brought me to my knees, now it only fills me with satisfaction.

I should have thrown her out of my life years ago. In fact, I never should have started at relationship with her in the first place. Of course, I wasn't strong enough at the time – but I'm strong enough now I have to be, for my pack, for Ella and Rafe, even for Roger.

I want to go straight home to Ella, but I know I need to work off some of this violent energy first. I take my guards to the forest, shifting the moment I'm out of the car, and leading them on a run through the dense woodland. I don't hold back, sprinting at top speed and leaving my men in the dust. I run until the flames of my fury are finally banked, only turning back once. My wolf is calm enough to think of Lydia without growling.

I decide to work from home for the rest of the day, and I finally make my way back to Ella. When I arrive home, she's sound asleep in my bed, curled up in a little ball beneath the covers. At first I think the round lump in the bedding is one of her pillows, but when I notice it breathing I realize that the precious human has burrowed into a cocoon of cotton and goose-down. Unable to resist, I lift the duvet to peek inside, leaning down to kiss her hair when I see her serene expression.

Afterwards I head for the shower, still sweaty from my run. I sigh as the steaming water envelopes me, telling myself that I have to go back to work after I'm clean, no matter how badly I want to crawl into bed with Ella and nap the afternoon away.

Just for a little while? My wolf begs. Five minutes?

You know it's never just five minutes. I grouse. Five minutes turns into fifteen, and that turns into an hour. Besides, Ella needs her rest. I'll probably wake her if I try to join.

But we promised to update her about Lydia. He reminds me, determined to win the argument. And we will. I promise, when she wakes up in her own time.

And so I force myself to dress and go to my study, promising myself I'll come check on Ella again in a few hours. In the end, however, she ends up finding me. Around three I hear small

door. feet padding down the hall, and then a soft knock on my

I cross the room in an instant, swinging it open and looking down at the beautiful human with a furrowed brow. “What are you doing out of bed?”

“I’m allowed two twenty minute walks, remember?” She remarks pointedly. “Besides I wanted a snack and when I asked my guard he told me you were home.”

“Mhmm, and how did you get down the stairs?” I inquire, brushing a few locks of hair back from her upturned face.

“Marcus carried me.” Ella declares, gesturing to the guard still trailing after her. “What happened with Lydia?”

I glance at the guard in question, telling my wolf we can’t be annoyed with the man for

following our orders not to let Ella near any staircases, just because we don’t like the fact that he touched her. “Let’s go to the kitchen and find you a snack, then we can talk.” I suggest, scooping Ella up.

“Dominic, I want to walk.” She groans. “I’ve been stuck in bed all day.”

“But there are more stairs.” I object, secretly thankful for this fact. I know the poor thing must be getting stir crazy, but I haven’t gotten to hold her since this morning, and I’ve missed her even after this short time apart.

“Fine but I’m standing when we get there.” Ella declares stubbornly.

“As long as you stand next to me, that’s fine by me.” I answer, hugging her close as I navigate the corridors. “Did you have a nice nap?”

“It was fine, what happened with Lydia?” Ella presses,

“So impatient.” I cluck, striding into the kitchen and setting her feet on the ground. “Food comes first. What were you craving?”

Ella squares her shoulders, crossing her arms over her chest and tilting her chin up defiantly.” Dominic Sinclair, I am not telling you anything or eating a bite until you tell me what happened.”

I arch one brow, towering over her and giving her my most disapproving look. Ella glares up at me for a few moments, but finally caves when I emit a low rumble. “Fine,” she huffs, going to the fridge. She extracts a bag of baby carrots and some of my chef’s homemade hummus, pointedly opening the container and dipping one of the orange batons into the rich puree and popping it into her mouth. She chews and swallows, then says, “there, happy?”

“Not yet.” I murmur, taking a seat at the counter and pulling her to stand between my legs. My wolf relaxes as soon as she’s in the protective circle of my reach, knowing we can catch her if she starts to feel faint. I dip another carrot and hold it to her lips, determined to feed her at minimum of five before finally agreeing to share the latest developments. Ella obediently munches the morsels, and I can tell that she was hungrier than she’d been willing to admit. Her grumpy energy gradually diminishes, until she’s eagerly waiting for the next bite. A bit later, I finally announce the news. “Lydia isn’t pregnant.”

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#Chapter 100 – Lydia Gets Desperate

3rd Person

Sinclair watched Ella like a hawk as his words landed. A riot of emotions flashed across her beautiful features, first relief, then happiness and finally worry and confusion. “We didn’t even sleep together.” He continued soberly. “She tried, but apparently I wasn’t interested – even drugged.”

“Oh.” The same progression of tangled feelings flitted across Ella’s expression, one which the Alpha understood only too well. He didn’t want a child with Lydia either, and he was beyond relieved he hadn’t actually been intimate with the conniving she-wolf – but there was no denying it would have solved a number of their problems. “So, we’re right back where we started, then.” Ella assessed softly.

“Yes, but I can still try to find another Luna.” Sinclair assured her. “I know it will take longer now, but it’s better this way. Lydia isn’t the mother I want for one of my pups, and she’s definitely not the woman I want for my queen.”

“I know.” Ella replied, leaning into his warmth. “I didn’t want her in our lives either, I’m just ... overwhelmed.”

“I know,” Sinclair sympathized, tucking her against his broad chest. “I’m going to find a way to make it better, Ella. I promise.”

“You better.” She grumbled, snuggling closer and breathing in his scent. As his comforting aroma filled her senses, she closed her eyes and sighed with pleasure, suddenly feeling the strangest compulsion to bite the big wolf. It was almost as if she wanted to mark him again, now that her scent had washed off in the shower now that she knew Lydia hadn’t succeeded. in her efforts to steal him.

Ella nuzzled Sinclair's pec, nudging his shirt aside and hesitantly parting her lips. She experimentally pressed her teeth into his flesh, but before she could give in to the instinct completely, Sinclair tangled one large fist in her hair and formed a handhold, pulling her head back.

"You bite me, I bite you back, baby." He purred, looking as though he didn't have any problem with this idea at all.

Something deep in Ella's bones melted at this thought, writhing with defiance and lust, eager to make him do just that. However her well-honed instincts for self-preservation forced down those strange feelings, and she blushed. "Sorry, I don't know what came over me."

"I do." Sinclair rumbled, moving his free hand to the curve of her belly. The baby kicked, as if confirming his guilt for influencing his mother's wolfish behavior. "But we have more to talk about, I promised I'd tell you about the driver from the accident."

Ella's dilated pupils sharpened then, as reason returned to her brain. "What did you find out?"

"He was hired by the Prince." Sinclair explained, "No surprise there. He was only supposed to be doing recon, but he also had orders to kill you if he saw an opening to do so."

"So when I walked into the street near his car..." Ella reasoned, piecing together this information with her memories.

"Exactly." Sinclair confirmed. "He thought it was the perfect opportunity."

"Did he know anything else about the Prince's plans?" Ella questioned, any hint of her earlier mischief gone now.

“He was supposed to be on the team of rogues the Prince hired for the attack Roger warned us about.” Sinclair shared, offering Ella another carrot.

She took it, but frowned. “Why haven’t we heard anything more about that? My bed rest isn’t public knowledge, is it?”

“No.” Sinclair confirmed, “but Roger said it would be a few weeks. The invitation could come any day now. Of course, now we have a valid excuse to refuse it.”

“But do we want people to know I’m on bed rest?” Ella asked, worry obvious in her voice.

“I think it’s our best option. No one will question your absence from the event, and I’ve already increased security here threefold. This house is basically a fortress at this point.” Sinclair assured her.

“Well I suppose that deals with the Prince for the time being, but what about Lydia? What if she tries something else?” Ella wondered aloud.

“Lydia isn’t going to be a problem anymore.” Sinclair proclaimed. “I exiled her, and if she wants to live, she’ll leave Moon Valley, and never come back.”

Across town, Lydia was fuming.

She’d been striving to become queen since she was a child. Her parents always told her she was meant for great things, so it hadn’t been hard to convince them to bring her to Moon Valley as a teenager. She’d sidled up to Henry Sinclair’s presumed heir, only to suffer the severe bad luck of choosing the wrong brother twice.

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It hadn't been easy to resist her fated mate, but she was never going to settle for a second son. Then, when Henry named Dominic his heir instead of Roger, she thought that the Goddess must have been right after all. Lydia dumped Roger and happily gave herself to Dominic, only to suffer one misfortune after another.

First Henry had been attacked in the middle of his campaign, preventing her from becoming a Princess. Then she hadn't been able to conceive an heir, which meant Sinclair would never get elected as King on his own merit. She'd blamed him for their infertility and decided to try and move on to greener pastures, but her new husband hadn't been amused when she couldn't give him an heir either.

At last Lydia thought her problems were solved when Sinclair found that little whore to be his surrogate, but for some reason she hadn't been able to waltz back into his life as if nothing had changed. He'd seemed genuinely angry about her departure, even though it's what any rational woman would have done in her shoes. She'd experience a quick flash of hope when she realized that his sperm was fertile after all, but then he'd ruined her plan to steal it.

Everything had fallen apart, and Lydia was sick of watching all her dreams slip away. She had to do something desperate times called for desperate measures, and she had to find a way to claim her rightful place in society without letting Sinclair know she hadn't left town.

Her first thought was to kill Ella, but without his heir, Sinclair wouldn't be King. Her second

thought was to wait until the baby was born and then kill the infuriatingly beautiful she-wolf, but after his reaction that

afternoon, Lydia had a sneaking suspicion the Alpha wouldn't take too kindly to the bitch's murder.

In the end, she realized there was only one thing to do. Sinclair wasn't going to take her back, but he wasn't the only wolf in the running to rule the Kingdom. The Prince already had an heir, and though he also had a mate, he didn't seem nearly as attached to her as Sinclair was to Ella. Besides, if Lydia played her cards right, he wouldn't ever know that she had anything to do with the Princess's untimely passing.

Yes, Lydia decided. With the Princess out of the way, the road would be clear for her to swoop in and take her place. She could tell the Prince all of Sinclair's weak spots, and help him win the election. Together they could rule the realm and lead the united packs into a whole new era. The Prince's ideology was much more in line with Lydia's anyway. She and Sinclair had never really seen eye to eye about things like charity or free speech.

The hard part was figuring out how to get to the Princess when she was frequently surrounded by guards. However, Lydia's experiences with Ella ended up helping there too. She remembered how easy it had been to approach the other she-wolf in the women's restroom where male guards couldn't follow.

Lydia scoured the internet for news about the Princess's planned campaign events and outings in the coming week, eventually discovering that she was going to be the guest of honor at a ribbon cutting for a new primary school in two days time. She spent the better part of the first day trying to figure out how she should go about taking the other woman's life, knowing it would be best if she could find a poison or something with a delayed effect. It would be much easier to get away with the crime if she wasn't present when the Princess actually took her last breath.

Finally Lydia settled on an aerosol toxin which she could hide in a perfume bottle, especially since everyone knew the reigning Luna's signature scent. The Princess had been a model before marrying the Prince, and she starred in multiple beauty ads to this day, but none of which were so famous as her Moonkissed fragrance ads. The perfume was the best selling scent in the realm because of her endorsement.

Thankfully Lydia had the foresight to have the poison she ordered online shipped to a random address, arriving to intercept the overnight delivery before it ever reached the actual resident. From there it was smooth sailing. She bought a fresh bottle of Moonkissed, emptied the contents and replaced it with her toxin. She went to the ribbon cutting and laid in wait in the bathroom, then accidentally crashed into the Princess when she entered, ensuring the Luna dropped her bag.

The contents spilled out over the floor, and then it was a simple slide of hand to switch the perfume bottles. Lydia left immediately afterwards, then waited for the news to break. It took all of 24 hours, until the next time the Princess applied her perfume right in the safety of the Royal Palace. Her death was instantaneous and for once, at long last, Lydia's plans actually paid off. There were no hiccups or unintended consequences, no unfortunate turns of fate. The Princess died just like she was supposed to, and Lydia's path to the Prince was clear. Now all that was left to do was make sure Sinclair lost the election then her future would

finally be secure.