

ACCIDENTAL SURROGATE FOR ALPHA

Read Novel Accidental Surrogate Chapter 361

Accidental Surrogate Chapter 361-When Sinclair and I come into the conference room hand-in-hand, the baby wrapped up and held in my other arm, my eyes go wide to see everyone waiting there. I want, immediately, to ask if this is a confrontation again – like the last time, when they all gathered first to decide how to tell me that I have an evil uncle who is trying to steal my kid.

But as Sinclair closes the door behind us, Henry sees the anxiety on my face. “It is just chance, Ella,” Henry tells me evenly, “that you are last here. I promise you that. Blame the baby – you need more time in the mornings than the rest of us.”

I exhale quickly in relief and then mockingly glare down at the baby, earning a few laughs from the assembled company. I smile around at everyone and realize that it looks like the entire team has been assembled. I’m particularly pleased to see that a few of the men I healed yesterday are here. It makes my heart soar to think that they’re well enough to join in, rather than being restricted their beds.

Before I can say anything, though, Sinclair tugs at my hand, leading me around to the empty chair next to Cora who gives me a bright smile and leans over to say good morning to Rafe – before he moves to his own spot at the center of the table, next to his father and his brother.

“Thank you,” Henry says when Sinclair nods to him to let him know that he’s ready. Then, he looks around at our assembled group, who all look to him with curious eyes.

“There have been some developments,” Henry begins, “both internally and externally. To begin, Ella and Cora have found a way to speed the healing of our men who were injured during our first mission.” He nods to us here, and I’m curious about his

language. Henry came to see me work yesterday, and was as impressed as the rest of us. But I note that his language is vague enough now to suggest that the healing is moving faster, but not how.

Obviously some of the men in the room know how I did it – they were there – but it appears as if Henry is keeping the news of my gift as secret as he can, even amongst our own people. I don't know how I feel about that – but there's no time to truly consider it as he moves on.

“This is lucky news,” Henry continues, “as it means that we may be able to launch another assault faster than we thought possible, with our men again fully able. And unfortunately, it seems as if this must be necessary.”

I feel the anxiety rise in me at this news and I look sideways at Cora to see that her expression is the same as mine – a little pale, worried. Neither of us want our mates out there again anytime soon not after we saw that one single priest could do.

I turn my attention back to the men and see Sinclair looking steadily at his father, nodding to him, encouraging him to explain his analysis.

“We have more evidence now than we did before,” Henry continues, “that Xander, brother to the dead king Xavier, is indeed the main force behind the kidnapping attempts on my grandson. This comes especially from our discovery that the doctor whom Ella had been seeing for fertility treatments previous to her switch to Cora's sperm bank, was, indeed, connected to Xander. Ella's previous physician is in fact the child of the man who had long served Xander and Xavier's family as personal physician.”

“Oh,” I can't help myself from saying, and then I raise my hand to my lips, sorry to have interrupted. But I'm surprised – I mean, I knew that that doctor had pointed me in the wrong direction but to hear that I had an uncle who set it all up...

I shake my head, considering that this betrayal has been in the works for such a long time.

Beside me, my sister reaches out to take my hand, giving me a little squeeze of support. I turn to her and smile a little, grateful for her, before turning to look down at my little baby. I mean, no one wanted him to be born as much as me, but to think that my uncle had been planning it for so long...

“Yes,” Henry says, watching me from his spot down the table. “I apologize, Ella, if the news comes as a shock. But the connection is too stark for it to be a coincidence. My advice, now that we know and now that we are closer to having a full force of men – is to move as swiftly as we can, while we can still

have some advantage in the situation. To the best of our intel, Xander does not yet know that we know he was involved – that he is the “master” to which this priest referred. It would be to our benefit to attack while we still have this advantage.”

Apparently finished, Henry sits back in his seat. Debate breaks out here, but I only turn half an ear to it, spending my time instead staring down at my little boy. I hear Roger ask some important questions like where Xander is now, and how well defended.

Sinclair counters Henry’s plan by suggesting that we may be better off waiting until Xander knows that we know it is him – rattling him, as Xander has never been a notoriously brave character,

especially considering that he’s played all of his cards from the safety of his own home rather than boldly going out to take control of the situation himself.

“So much depends on you, little baby,” I murmur to Rafe as the conversation continues. And I sigh a little anxious sigh as I watch my baby look around the busy room, his eyes – I know – not really understanding anything, but alert and interested anyway. I clench my teeth then, hating it. Hating that this man I’ve never met is putting such pressure on my little child.

Rafe is just a baby – a perfect, innocent little soul. And yet he is already being figured as a figurehead behind which my uncle can hide, as a political pawn that someone else can use to gain power. It horrifies me to consider that Rafe was created as a reaction, in some ways, to my mate’s powerful ascension to the throne: as a way to combine royal blood with powerful blood, to create a ruler to whom no one could reasonably object.

But really, really?

This is my child, created by me, carried by me, loved by me. And it fills me with a very real rage that there are people in this world who view him as a bargaining chip rather than the wonderful, loved miracle he is.

That rage is burning deep within me as I raise my head and realize that the room has gone silent and everyone has turned to me. I don’t have it in me to apologize for not listening, though. Instead, I just look at Sinclair, knowing that he will understand.

“It is your uncle, Ella,” Sinclair says quietly. “Your blood. We will take him out fast tonight, if we can. We think 1 it is best. But we won’t do it without your assent.”

It barely takes a moment – a single blink for me to decide.

“Do it,” I say, my voice cold. “Tear his throat out. But before you do, tell him that I wanted him dead. That I ordered it done. Please.” And then I stand up and look down to Cora. “We have work to do, yes?”

Cora grins at me, proud and a little vicious herself, as she stands up and takes my hand.

I then look towards Sinclair, who gives me a deep nod, agreeing. And then, as one, Cora and I leave the room, heading towards our makeshift little medical suite to continue healing the men, to get them ready for the fight which I know is coming soon.

As the door begins to close behind us, I hear Henry’s words.

“All right. Let’s get started on a plan of attack.”

Accidental Surrogate Chapter 362-Ella and I work the rest of the morning, me making the big decisions about who needs the most medical care next and taking Rafe from her when she’s working. I watch every time she heals someone, unable to tear my eyes away from it. And while I thought I would be jealous – honestly, my sister is doing better work than I ever have as a doctor – I can only feel thrilled that we have this incredible tool in our hands.

Especially, especially considering that Roger came to tell me a few hours ago that they plan to attack tonight. That he and Sinclair are, again, going to put their lives on the line to stop this horrible man who wants to hurt our family.

Just the bare idea that Ella can help if they come home in pieces....

I close my eyes for a moment – Rafe sleeping in my arms while Ella settles down and starts talking with her next patient – dismissing the thought. Because if I start to think about what could happen tonight...

I’ll never be able to let him go. I feel a warm presence beside me as my eyes are closed and smile a little, because I know immediately who it is. And I’m

gratified to find that I was right when I open my eyes and see my beautiful mate standing there next to me, smiling down into my face.

“Hello, gorgeous,” Roger says softly.

“Are you talking to me?” I ask, “or the baby?”

“Well,” Roger says, looking down and pretending to consider little sleeping Rafe, “I mean he’s cute, but I’m not sure I’d go so far as to say gorgeous.

I laugh a little, shaking my head, but Roger just smiles at me again and raises a hand to my cheek. “How are you holding up?”

“Oh it’s all easy for me,” I say, turning towards him with a grin and nodding towards Ella. “She does all the work.”

He laughs a little and we both turn towards her then, watching the miracle get started. “Can you take a break?” he whispers, not wanting to disturb. ” When this one is done?”

“Why?” I whisper back, confused, but not taking my eyes away. “Do you need something?”

“No,” he replies with a little shrug. Just...a lull. I wanted a moment to check in with you before we start getting ready to go.”

My stomach twists a little at his words but I nod, reaching out to take his hand. A break will be good.

When Ella finishes with her current patient we quickly consult about the plan to take a short break to talk to our mates and she agrees eagerly, taking the baby and hurrying out of the room to find Sinclair. Roger takes my hand and we follow after her, heading towards our own shabby little barracks room to take a minute to ourselves.

He doesn’t bother to turn the light on when we enter our room, instead just closing the door and leading me over to the bed. I’m pleased by this – pleased that I want what he wants in this moment, which is just a quiet minute alone with him. Roger lays down first and then I lay my body close next to his, putting my head on his chest and letting my arm trail over his body, holding him close.

“How’s the baby?” I murmur, wanting to know. Roger takes a deep breath and, even though I can’t see him, I know that he’s closing his eyes, concentrating on his bond with the baby and assessing how the little bean is doing.

“Baby’s doing good,” he sighs happily, pulling me close to him. Then, with a little chagrin that makes me laugh, he continues. “I think this baby is going to be a workhorse like you. It’s getting all sorts of messages from you that busy means happy. You’re a bad influence.”

I laugh and this, giving him a little smack on the chest. “What,” I ask, “do you want the baby to be lazy like you?”

“To begin,” he counters, and I can almost feel him shoot me a little glare, “I am not lazy. I merely...prioritize and enjoy my down time. You could benefit from some lazy in your life, Cora.” He begins to run a hand slowly across my shoulders now. “I could make it worth your while,” he murmurs suggestively.

I laugh a little and snuggle closer to him, feeling my spirit renew after even a few quiet moments alone with him. “I think you might be right, Roger,” I start – but my words are cut off when he gasps.

“What?” he asks dramatically, “one of the Reina sisters, admitting that a Sinclair is right?!”

I laugh again and snuggle closer. Don’t tease me,” I murmur, “or I won’t do it again.” He laughs and relents, letting me continue. “But yes,” I sigh. ” I think that I have in my life thrown myself into my work as a way to feel like I was...doing something. Being productive. Being useful. But I think...” I hesitate now, trying to put my thoughts together. “I think this little baby is going to have enough of that as it is,” I sigh.

“What do you mean?” Roger asks worried but interested.

“Well,” I consider. “I mean – Rafe was conceived because a man wanted him to be born – because he has royal blood, and goddess blood, and Sinclair blood. And while our baby was...more spontaneous,” I say, smirking a little at the memory of how our child was conceived, “I can’t help but think, Roger, that...”

“That something was conspiring to get us together,” he sighs, nodding. “That we were kind of forced off the road by an insane storm the day you were ovulating.”

“Yeah,” I sigh, hugging him tighter now, a little afraid. “And...”

“What?” he asks, encouraging.

“Well,” I whisper, “I was thinking about...Ella, today. Watching her access our mother’s gift. And then I was holding Rafe the whole time. And Roger ...I think that Xander wanted Rafe to be conceived mostly because of his royal blood – but I think what has been underestimated here is the fact that Rafe is the grandson of a goddess. And our child will be too. What if these children have access to the same kind of gift that Ella has...”

“Do you have the gift?” Roger asks, curious.

“I can wield it,” I point out, “when Ella passes it to me.”

“Why didn’t you guys get two?” he asks. “I don’t know,” I say, frowning. “Maybe one was enough. Or...maybe because Ella asked for it when we were out in the desert.”

“Do you want it?” he asks, quiet. “If you were to ask your mother for your own gift...would you want that?”

“I don’t know,” I whisper, truly trying to weigh the question. “Because on one hand it would be wonderful to do what Ella does with the gift – to save live likes that? But also...if it means that the baby would inherit such a thing...”

“That kind of pressure,” he murmurs.

“And that kind of target,” I add, shaking my head. “I don’t know. I just don’t know, Roger.”

“Well,” he says quietly, and I can feel him turn towards me, scootching down on the bed so that our faces are close together now. “Why don’t we go to your mom and ask?”

Accidental Surrogate Chapter 363-“What?” I ask, laughing a little, thinking that he’s kidding. “What are you talking about?”

“Go see your mom,” Roger continues, giving a little shrug. “Like we did with Ella, in the desert. Honestly, I think it was kind of rude of your mom at that moment to focus all on Ella and pretend that she wasn’t your mom too

“Roger,” I sigh, shaking my head. “You can’t call a goddess rude. We were on a mission and honestly, Ella went there to speak with her mother. I didn’t know – and I wasn’t ready. She’s a goddess you have to assume that she does things on her own time. For her own reasons.”

“I don’t know why you’re being so nice about it,” Roger growls, a little perturbed. “If I were you I’d be mad.”

“Yes, baby,” I murmur, “but you’re always mad.” This earns a little laugh from him, but I continue after a moment. “It’s hard to explain it,” I say quietly. “But when I held the gift – when I gave it to the world...Roger, I felt her love for me then. It was very rich and very real. She doesn’t love Ella more than she loves me. She’s just waiting for me to be ready.”

“Well?” he asks, nudging me with his nose. “Are you ready?”

I laugh a little, again thinking that he’s not serious.

“Really, Cora,” Roger urges, pulling back a little. “I think we should do it. We have all of these questions – about you, about the baby, about her and her plans for you. Why not? When this is all cleaned up when we have a minute to spare, let’s go on a little pilgrimage to one of your mother’s temples, like we did when we went to go find Reina. Let’s go...have a chat.”

I stop laughing when I consider it – consider if I want it.

“Plus,” he adds, tracing a finger over the soft skin between my shoulder and neck. “We can ask what will happen if I give you my mark. Because my damn wolf won’t shut up about it.”

I laugh, pleased. “What does he say?”

“He says, ‘bite her! Now!’” Roger murmurs, frustrated, and I laugh harder now to hear it, considering that it must be difficult having a wolf interrupting your thoughts all the time.

“And he says it at the most frustrating times,” Roger continues. “Like when we’re just having dinner – like I’m going to jump across the table and grab you

or something. Or when you're just walking down the hall and I happen to glance at your ass. Or when you're asleep –

“When I'm asleep!?” I gasp, laughing. Roger do not bite me in my sleep-

“I won't,” he growls, shaking his head. “But it's seriously annoying – he wants you to have it.” And then his voice shifts a little in tone. “I want you to have it, Cora. I want the baby to feel it too.”

“I want it,” I sigh, reaching out to stroke his face. “I do.” And then I nod, decided, as my hand goes to my stomach and I think about the baby and all the things we need to know. “All right,” I whisper. “We'll do it. When we're able to get back to a more normal life, when this is all fixed? We'll go see my mom.”

“Really put the screws to her,” Roger murmurs, and I can feel his smirk. “Ask her what the hell is going on with this mark, and this crazy hybrid baby. And why those priests were following you as well as Ella your whole life.”

“Okay, well, let's not go that far,” I laugh, shaking my head. “Honestly, Roger only you would have the idea to 'put the screws' to a Goddess.”

“Anyone who messes with my mate,” he growls, a little territorial but also a little kidding, “has to go through me.”

“Okay, puppy,” I murmur, patting him on the head and smiling. “Calm down.”

Roger snarls and shakes my hand away. “Call me puppy again,” he warns, shifting his body again so that he looms over me. “And I'll put the screws to you, little mate.”

“Awwww,” I say, cooing mockingly. “Lil puppy get mad? Not like his new name?”

Roger growls again, snapping his teeth at me, and then he presses his lips to mine in a fierce kiss, determined to teach me a lesson.

Ella

After Sinclair and I take an hour or two alone with Rafe, we part ways so that he can get himself and his troops ready and I can go back to the medical room to continue healing. I'm on my way there, Rafe's little carrier in my

hands, when I spy Cora in the kitchen making a cup of tea. And suddenly, that's precisely what I want.

"Hey," I say, breezing into the room and lifting Rafe's carrier up onto the counter. "Can you make me a cup as well?"

"Sure, sis," Cora says, giving me a little smile. And, sensing something, I lean closer to her, sniffing the air around her.

"Ohhhh," I say, my face breaking into a wide grin. "Someone had a nice afternoon with their mate."

Cora snaps her head to me, shocked, and then she bursts out laughing before giving me a little push. "Ew, Ella! If you can smell that on me, please do us all the favor of pretending you don't."

"Why?" I say, leaning on the counter and rocking Rafe's carrier a little in an attempt to lull him to sleep – it's time for him to take a nap, and he's almost there, I can tell. "I'm glad you and Roger are finding such a good connection. I'm not embarrassed by it."

"Well," she sighs, but I can still see a smile on her face, "please remember that your sister is human and not as crass as you wolf folks."

"You mean more of a prude," I say, laughing at her but letting it drop. She laughs along with me, shaking her head as she pours boiling water into two mugs. Then she stirs a tea bag into each and turns to me while they steep.

"How are you feeling?" she asks, looking me up and down. "Nervous about tonight?"

"Obviously," I murmur. And then, my eyes flicking to the side to ensure we're alone, I take a step closer. "Honestly, Cora, I was thinking about going along

"What?!" she gasps.

"I could do it!" I say, grabbing her hand. "I could just like, sneak into a trunk as they're pulling away! And you know I would be useful – I could be on hand to heal them as they went! I could save lives – "

"Don't be ridiculous, Ella," Cora scoffs, frowning at me and pulling her hand away. "Sinclair would kill you and even if he didn't, someone else would! You

would ruin it, because there's no way he'd let you stay – he'd make everyone turn around to drive you home!"

"He would not!" I protest. "He wouldn't give up the element of surprise! He'd be forced to -"

"Really, Ella?" Cora says, leaning against the counter and raising an eyebrow at me. "That's your plan? To make your mate choose between your safety and having the element of surprise on your enemy?"

I scowl, realizing that she's right – that all I'd be doing horrible position. putting him in a

Then I sigh, giving up the plan for good. "I just hate feeling helpless," I say, looking down at the floor and shaking my head. "Especially as we know now that I can be such a big help."

"I get it, Ellie," Cora says, taking a step towards me to wrap me in a hug. "I really do. That's why I wanted to go last time – for the same reasons."

We both look at each other for a long moment then, and I'm so selfishly pleased, suddenly, that my sister and Roger found each other. Because now we each have someone who truly understands the other.

Because certainly no one else in the world right now knows the pain of sending your mate off on what could realistically be a mission with a death sentence.

But what's the alternative?

In so many ways, I feel continually backed into a corner by this whole process. Like as every day passes I am being forced closer and closer to having to make a choice between the two people I love most.

Who do you choose to survive? The universe seems to be asking me. Your mate or your child?

Accidental Surrogate Chapter 364-Ella

Cora and I stand silently in the garage of the bunker, watching our mates pack their cars in preparation for their assault. Rafe is in my arms, fussing

unhappily, and Henry has rolled his chair up on Cora's other side, likewise watching tensely.

"It will be finished tonight," Henry says, nodding confidently. "I know it. The boys will finish this."

"I hope you are right, Henry," I sigh. "I don't know how much longer I can keep sending him off like this."

Henry looks up at me, sympathy in his eyes, but I can't return his gaze – I'm too overwhelmed. Instead, I look down at my little red baby, who is now crying unhappily in my arms.

Minutes – I know we've got minutes left until Roger and Sinclair leave. And I can barely take it.

"Come here, mini trouble," Sinclair murmurs, and I jump a little as I realize that he's close to me now, reaching out for the baby. I was too lost in my thoughts. I look up at my mate, my eyes filled with tears, and silently hand over the baby in to his waiting arms.

He doesn't turn his attention to Rafe, though, instead putting out his other arm to wrap around me. I rest my head against his chest, looking away from him. But my eyes just fall on Cora and Roger, saying their own goodbyes next to me, and I can't take that either.

So I turn my head in the other direction, pressing my eyes shut.

"It will be okay, Ella," Sinclair whispers to me, the baby going quiet in his arms, as he always does, "I promise you, it will be okay."

"I know you'll do everything you can, Dominic," I whisper. "I trust you – it's just the rest of the world, and what it has in store, that I can't trust."

He nods, understanding, and then presses a kiss to my hair, pulling away too soon.

"No," I gasp, wrapping my hand around the strap of his bullet-proof vest and keeping him close.

“Ella,” he murmurs, turning my face up to him with a touch of his fingers beneath my chin. And I stare up at him, my beautiful, tender, ferocious mate. I’m coming back to you. Tonight. And then we’ll have peace.”

“You’d better,” I growl, narrowing my eyes at him. “Or I am going to be very mean to your ghost.”

Sinclair laughs at this, shaking his head and passing the baby back to me. Then he presses a kiss to my mouth, tells me he loves me, and turns towards his car. Cora moves close to me next, slipping her hand around my elbow with a big sigh.

“This is it, Ella,” she says. “The big push. After this, we’ll have peace.”

“I feel like I’ve been hearing that a lot, Cora,” I say as I turn to look at her, my bad spirits getting the best of me for just a moment.

“Well,” she says, her lips twitching a little towards a smile as she holds the hope for both of us. “At some point, it’s got to be right.”

And together, we watch our mates and their team pull out of the garage and drive away. Predictably, things are simultaneously boring and tense once the boys are gone.

“What should we do?” Cora asks as the three of us file into the little kitchen and sink down around the table. The bunker isn’t totally quiet – there’s still a good number of people left here.

Mostly those persons who are still too ill to join the assault team, or those members whose skills lie more in research than in war.

It’s good to have more people around, but still, I know that the three of us feel like we’re the only people in the world right now, so united are we in our misery. Or, well, four people, if we’re including Rafe. But I sigh as I look down at the little baby, who is falling asleep now. “You don’t even know what’s going on, baby,” I murmur, a little jealous.

“I think,” Henry says, dipping a hand into the pocket of his wheelchair and coming out with a deck of cards. “That this is a moment that calls for a distraction.”

Cora perks up a little. “Nothing says distraction like a couple hands of high-stakes poker,” she quips. I smile at her, knowing that Cora loves cards. She’s clever and precise enough with them to be a bit of a card sharp. That’s how she kept us supplied with pocket money and candy in the orphanage, after all.

“Yes,” I say, leaning forward a little eagerly. “Now that the boys are gone, let’s gamble away all their money,” I say, perking up myself at the idea.” Show them what they get for going off to war without us.”

“Only fair,” Henry murmurs as he shuffles and we sit, a little smile playing at his lips. “What shall the buy in be, ladies? Half a million? Each of my sons’ first-born child?”

“Why not both?” I ask, grinning.

Two hours later, Henry has put us both to shame and earned not only a million dollars but also apparent ownership of his two grandchildren.

“Here you go,” I sigh, pretending to hand the sleeping baby off to him. ” He’s all yours now.”

Henry laughs and puts up a hand. “I’ll let you maintain ownership for now,” he laughs, pulling the cards towards him to put them neatly back in their box. “I know you’re fond of him, after all. I’ll call for him when I am ready to put him to work.”

“What about this one,” Cora says, looking down at her still-flat tummy. She cocks her head to the side and smirks at Henry. “Should we agree on a lay-away plan for this one as well?”

Henry laughs again and shakes his head, opening his mouth to reply, but suddenly there’s a huge bang from down the hall from the entrance to the bunker.

The three of us go silent, tensely turning towards the door, waiting to see BOOM.

It comes again, followed by the creaking of metal.

“Shit,” Henry curses – something that makes me turn to him with wide eyes. Never, ever have I heard him utter a curse before.

This, more than the banging, lets me know that something is truly wrong.

Quick as a whip, Henry grabs his phone from its place on the table, glancing at it. “Nothing else from the boys,” he murmurs, slipping the phone into the pocket of his chair and starting to roll towards the door. “Come,” he snaps at us. “Now, Ella, Cora. Come now.”

We both jump to our feet, our hands shaking again as BOOM –

Rafe is still in my arms but some piece of me thinks to grab his carrier as Cora and I follow Henry. As I leave the kitchen I turn towards the bunker entrance towards the huge metal door that seals us in here. And to my horror, I can see it beginning to peel back at the corner. I go pale realizing – Realizing that someone is trying to get in

“Oh my god,” Cora gasps, raising trembling hands to her mouth. “Henry

“COME!” he commands, wheeling fast down the hall against a wave of our own men who all come out of their rooms, heading towards the door.

My sister and I are in action as the hall fills with more noise – more pounding from the door, the shouts of our men – Henry’s own insistent calls to follow him –

We catch up with him as Henry wheels fast into the conference room, and we look around at the worried faces of the few men who are still in here, working on some new plans –

Accidental Surrogate Chapter 365-Assault Ella As the startled men hurry out of the conference room, Henry turns to Cora and I, looking at us with a grim expression as we stare at him in terror.

“I have made a grave miscalculation,” he informs us with a steady, regretful nod. “I am sorry, girls – I have failed you – ”

“Wha- what?” I gasp, holding my baby tight. “Henry – what are you talking about?”

“It was a trap,” he says, looking towards the door, where we can still hear the banging – increased in pace now – as well as shouts, the beginning of screams –

“A trap?” Cora asks, turning towards the door herself.

“They knew,” he says, and I’m still staring at Henry as he shakes his head. “They must followed us back here after the sewer and then bided their time, waiting for the bulk of our forces – and our most powerful wolves – to leave before they attacked. Damn it!” he shouts, slamming a frustrated hand against the arm of his chair. “I was a fool, to leave you and the child unguarded!”

“Oh my god,” I whisper, my voice trembling as I try to wrack my brain for something – anything to do next – “Come,” Henry says, pulling himself together and rolling quickly to the corner of the room. There, he points to the edge of the carpet. “Cora,” he orders. “Pull that up.”

Cora does as he says, instantly falling to her knees and digging her hands into the corner of the carpet, getting her fingers beneath and pulling as hard as she can. I can’t help my surprise when I see what is revealed when she pulls enough of it back.

A trap door.

“Open it,” Henry snaps, and Cora does so, lifting the little latch and swinging the door up to reveal a very thin winding staircase that leads down, down, down.

“Go,” Henry orders, not looking to us and nodding towards it.

“Henry,” I protest, shaking my head. “We can’t leave you.”

Sudden screams start to burst out from the hallway, making me jump. And then my face drops in horror as I hear gunfire as well.

“You will go, Ella,” Henry growls, wrapping his hand around my arm and shoving me towards the passage. “Go down.”

Keep going. At the bottom is a tunnel, and at the end of it, a car. God willing it is in good repair. You must run as far and as fast as you can.”

Then he takes his phone out of the pocket of his chair and presses it into my hand. “Tell them what happened as soon as you are out. But don’t tell them where you are until you get to a different phone. Who knows – ”

He sighs, and puts his head in his hands, and I can see his shoulders shaking. "There's not enough time."

The noise in the hall grows louder and my breath comes faster as I realize what we have to do.

"All right," I say, nodding to Cora and then swooping down to kiss Henry on the cheek. "Henry, we love you. We'll – we'll come back for you."

"Don't," he says, his eyes only on Rafe now, who squalls unhappily in my arms at all the noise. "Take the baby – take yourselves. Get safe girls. I love you too."

And then Cora and I are moving, my heart wrenching to leave him – to leave him like this – Cora goes down the twisting stair first and I follow quickly after, reaching out to hand her the phone so that she can light our way and the baby carrier so I can balance Rafe more safely in my arms. After Cora takes these supplies, I turn my face upwards to say a last word to Henry –But the door snaps shut above me, leaving me in darkness.

"Ella," Cora cries, "Ella please – come we have to go -"

"I'm coming, Cora," I say, swallowing my horrible fear and steeling myself for all we have to do next. We have to survive.

We have to get out of here – for the babies to warn our mates –

I open my eyes and look determinedly down at her. "Let's go."

Cora nods to me once, and then she starts again down the stairs.

Sinclair "Any word?" Roger asks me as our men begin to unload themselves from the cars. We've arrived at our place of entrance,

which I grimace again to see is a sewer.

I'm aware that this is the best way in –that through this public sewer we can begin to access unseen the roads closest to Xavier's stronghold. But still, if I never

went in another sewer for the rest of my life, that would be fine by me.

“Nothing new,” I say, glancing at my phone, where I’ve been keeping in touch with my father. “Apparently they’re playing poker.”

“Oh,” Roger says, his eyebrows raising in pleasure. “Well, good. Cora will clean up at that.”

“Yeah,” I mutter, tucking my phone away. “I have a feeling that Ella bet the house.”

“Good,” Roger says again, grinning at me. “I always liked your house. Do you think you can be out by the end of the week?”

I don’t say anything, just shooting him a little glare, but I can’t help but smile a little bit. Roger’s certainly in a good mood,

which makes me feel better.

But still I have to admit that there’s... something roiling in my gut. Something tugging at my instincts that just says wrong wrong.

But I push it aside, even though my wolf howls to see me do it. We’re on a mission, after all, and we’re short on time. I’m not going to call this off just because it doesn’t feel perfect.

I look around at the men ranged around me. “Ready?” I ask, and I get a series of nods all around. “Forward, then,” I say,

nodding to them and pointing towards the sewer entrance.

The men go first this time, taking the lead so that Roger and I can bring up the tail. We’ll switch when we get closer to the assault itself, which should bring us, interestingly, right up into Xavier’s property, if not up into his house itself.

It’s good luck that the sewer connects so close there, but my wolf still prowls within me, snarling too good too easy – not right –But I shake my head, watching my men disappear in the tunnel, dismissing my wolf’s nerves. After all, where were these hesitations when we planned the assault? Nothing has changed. We’re pressing forward, and that’s the end of it.

When each of our thirty men has disappeared into the sewer, Roger steps forward to go next. “All right, brother?” he asks,

looking at me before he disappears into the dark. “You’re not quite yourself.”

“I’m fine,” I snap, tucking my phone into the pocket of my pants. “Prepare yourself. We’ve got about forty-five minutes of darkness and radio silence down there,” I inform him, slipping into the sewer after him. “We’re not going to get any cell signal down there.”

“No worries, bro,” Roger says, grinning at me in the darkness as I re-seal the entrance. “I know enough showtunes to whistle along the way. I’ll keep you entertained.”

And then, shaking my head at my brother but grateful to have him by my side, I begin the assault.