

Accidental Surrogate For Alpha By Caroline Above Chapter 17

Chapter 17-Preparation

288 Vouchers

Some of my confidence has waned on the ride home. Sinclair has been so mysterious about this scent marking business, and I don't like the way he keeps looking at me as if I'm some prey to be devoured.

There's still so much I don't understand about this world, like how carrying his child can make me smell more like a wolf myself, or how someone can leave a mark which must be sensed and smelled, rather than seen with the naked eye. Not for the first time, I'm jealous of shifters' heightened abilities. The more time that passes, the more enchanted I am by the idea of transforming, of letting out one's inner animal and being truly wild and free. I don't know why I like the idea so much it's not like I have an inner animal to release, so I'm not actually missing out.

"You look nervous." Sinclair observes, resting one proprietary hand on my knee as the car speeds along. Of course, his touch only makes me more antsy.

"You can fix that." I suggest, "it doesn't have to be a surprise."

"True, but it's much more fun this way." He smirks.

"Fun for you maybe." I mutter mutinously. "Besides, if you want your scent to be strongest tomorrow, shouldn't we wait?"

"And deprive myself of the opportunity to do it a second time?" He arches a brow, "why on earth would I do that?"

"I...." I don't know what to make of this. If he were anyone else I'd think he was flirting with me, but that's not possible. Wolves and humans don't mix. Maybe he simply enjoys teasing me, like a cat toying with a mouse. He certainly enjoys making me squirm. I realize this must be the reason, and suddenly I find myself feeling very indignant. I don't like the idea of being some plaything to the hungry predator. I narrow my eyes at him. "Maybe I won't let you." I decide.

The hand on my knee tightens, but not enough to hurt. "What was rule number one, little human?"

"That I should be as relaxed and happy through my

—
pregnancy, so you shouldn't be making me nervous." I reason, knowing full well he expects me to confirm that he – as Alpha – is in charge.

"You forget I have a link straight to our pup, I know when you're stressed, and when you're just making mischief." Sinclair rumbles. "But if you want more justification for doing it often, it's to avoid scenes like what just happened. If people can't see your shoulder and also smell me on you very powerfully, they can be fooled into thinking I have marked you. We can give the mating ceremony excuse to those who ask, but it would be better to avoid the questions altogether."

A little while later, Sinclair is standing in front of me in my room, looking so powerful and attractive I'm almost too distracted to hear him speak. "Take off your clothes." He instructs.

"What, all of them?" I squeak.

"You can keep your underwear on, but it's better if we're skin- to-skin." He says, unbuttoning his own shirt.

I watch with wide eyes as he strips down to his boxer-briefs, taking in the sight of his muscular body and feeling my jaw go slack. I've never seen anyone so rugged and chiseled.

"Do I need to take them off for you?" He asks, arching a brow and stepping forward.

"What? No!" I yelp, reminding myself that he's already seen me in my bra and panties. Taking a deep breath, I carefully lift my dress over my head, bracing myself for whatever is to come next.

Standing beside Sinclair in a ball gown, done up from head to toe in makeup, jewelry and heels, it seems hard to believe Sinclair was rubbing his mostly naked body all over me an hour ago. Scent marking – I've learned – is a deeply intimate act, one that confuses me more than I care to admit.

Yesterday when he marked me the first time, he took it slow and explained every step of the process, making sure I understood why it was so important to impart his scent on every inch of my body. This second-time, however, was completely different. There were no explanations, no soothing caresses for my fraz*led nerves. He came to

me with a mission in mind, and slowly, sensuously covered me in his pheromones. If he noticed my body's response to his attentions my aching breasts and liquid arousal, he gave no indication.

Now those feelings are long gone, as we're finally at the campaign dinner I've been preparing for non-stop over the last 48 hours. Sinclair quizzed me in the car on the way over, testing my knowledge of shifter society and nodding with

288 Vouchers

approval when I smoothly answered each of his prompts. He hasn't said a word otherwise, which tells me just how much tension he's carrying in anticipation of the event.

When we arrive at an incredible palace, I can't keep my jaw from dropping to the floor. "I've never seen such a beautiful estate."

"This is where our pup will be raised if my campaign is successful." He shares, "The King's Palace."

"Why is the current King stepping down?" I ask as we climb the marble stairs, mostly trying to distract myself from all the flashing cameras and reporters screaming out to get Sinclair's attention.

"Alpha Dominic, over here!"

"Alpha Dominic, who's your date?"

"It wasn't his choice." Sinclair shares. "He's getting old and is no longer the strongest among us. The alpha council voted to force him to abdicate."

"Does he not have heirs of his own?" I question, trying my best to smile and wave at the crowd vying for attention around us.

"His eldest son is my biggest competition – and he would be a disaster." Sinclair intimates, ducking his head low enough that his lips brush the shell of my ear. "You're doing brilliantly by the way – look at them all, eating out of the palm of your hand."

I giggle quietly, feeling a wave of appreciation for the support. Normally I would be beside myself with nerves to

walk into a room like this, surrounded by rich and powerful people – shifters. However next to Sinclair, the blatant stares and avid attention doesn't bother me. I feel confident by his side, even as I'm bowled over

by his raw power. I didn't realize how much of it he keeps reined in on a day-to-day basis. Now however I can feel it viscerally, flowing off of him in a riptide. of authority.

Before I know it, we've left the reporters behind and are crossing the ballroom to a pair of thrones at the end of a great hall. The throngs of people part to let us pass, and I have to admit – I do feel like royalty. No one has ever shown me so much respect or admiration.

I'm still reveling in the attention we're drawing when we stop in front of the King and Queen. They're both incredibly impressive. The king's hair is streaked with gray, but he still has an air of unquestionable strength. His Luna is lovely and dignified, with features that hint to great beauty in her.

younger years.

Sinclair nods to each of them, while I dip into a curtsy. "Alpha Dominic," The king greets Sinclair with a smile that doesn't reach his eyes. "Dare I say you've finally found a mate?"

"That's right." Sinclair announces, loudly enough for all to hear. "And the Goddess has blessed us with a pup."

"Well I must say you have excellent taste. You, my dear, are an incredible beauty." The Luna smiles, no more genuinely than her husband. "Congratulations to you both!"

The announcement prompts a rush of supporters to gather around us both, and before I even realize it's happened, Sinclair is no longer beside me, we're separated by a few

11

people, but I can still see him, so I try not to panic. "You must tell us your name!" A small throng of women gush in front of me.

"I'm Ella." I share, unsure whether I should use my own surname, or his. "Soon to be Sinclair." I lie, deciding to stick with our cover.

They squeal with excitement, and more people swirl around me, until at last I'm faced by an imposing looking man. He's watching me sharply, almost with suspicion. "Tell me, Ella, where are you from? How is it we've never seen you before?"

“I come from the Shadow Pack, in the north.” I explain, repeating the lie Sinclair and I agreed upon. “I was in town visiting my cousin when I met Sinclair, and the rest is history.”

“Oh, what cousin?” He asks, zeroing in on the detail.

“Aileen Corentin.” I bluff, smiling widely.

“As in the wife of Dominic’s beta?” He presses. “And you only met him recently?”

“Yes

our families are deeply estranged. Bad blood you know, divided allegiances and all that.” I explain. “I only recently learned I had a cousin here, but once I did I reached out so we could meet.”

“Hmm,” He murmurs thoughtfully. “Still you must have been here some time, if you’re already breeding.”

“Not long at all.” I correct him, “but you know how it is when you find the one... or maybe you don’t. I didn’t believe in love at first sight myself, until I found Dominic.” I beam towards

the man in question, trying to look as if I’m head over heels in love.

It must have worked, because he excuses himself and slips away into the crowd, a thoughtful expression on his face.

I watch him stride away, hoping Sinclair will return to my side soon. I can’t explain why, but I feel that wasn’t the last I’ll see of that man, and I don’t want to be alone the next time he finds me.

