

Accidental Surrogate for Alpha

Chapter 178

Ella

“Hello Ella, I’m Leon.” I’m staring skeptically at the strange man, not trusting this one bit. He doesn’t bat an eye and only continues as if I’m not watching him like a wary rabbit preparing to bolt.”

King Gabriel tells me you’re in the market for a hypno-therapist.”

I don’t respond, still sizing him up. I’ve never liked doctors and with good reason, but after learning that the OBGYN who prompted me to go to the sperm bank turned out to be a fraud, I find myself even more suspicious of anyone in the field than usual. Frankly, the idea of laying back and closing my eyes while some stranger delves into my deepest, darkest memories makes me feel sick to my stomach. If my mate were here it might be different, he would provide me with the sense of safety I need to let my guard down, but he isn’t here and my wolf is very on edge. A low growl slips out of my mouth, and I feel my lips curling back to bare my fangs.

Leon shoots a nervous glance at Gabriel, who seems entirely unphased. He gestures for the therapist to continue, so Leon forges on, “I understand that hypnosis can seem very daunting.” Leon acknowledges, “we’re searching understand that hypnosis can seem very daunting.” Leon acknowledges, “we’re searching for things your mind has hidden from you for your own protection, but I assure you that I’ve been doing this for a very long time and you’re in good hands. I will help you through every step of the process, and I’ll be able to pull you out of the dream state if it becomes overwhelming. You can have someone stay with you through the process if you like, but you need to make sure it’s someone with whom you are comfortable sharing these memories.”

“Like you?” I scoff, knowing I’m being unnecessarily rude but not caring. “A random man off the street who has done nothing to earn my trust but expects me to lay myself emotionally bare at your whim?”

Gabriel opens his mouth to speak, but Leon holds up a staying hand to the King. “It’s okay, she’s exactly right. Normally we would be doing this as part of a much broader therapy regimen where we would have the space and time to form a bond of trust. I would be concerned if you didn’t feel anxious about this, Ella, but I also know that time is a luxury we don’t have.”

“How about I go get Cora? I’m sure she’d be happy to stay with you.” Gabriel suggests, intentionally making his voice low and soothing.

“I want Dominic.” I answer sharply, my arms wrapped defensively around my body.

Gabriel sighs, “I know, but he isn’t here, Ella. You’re going to have to pick someone else.”

My lip quivers dangerously, and for a second I’m furious with Sinclair for leaving me to do this alone. A moment later I’m kicking myself for being so selfish, and tears well in my eyes. I blink them away, hating my weakness. We could just attack him. My wolf suggests slyly. He doesn’t look so tough, I bet we could take him. There can’t be hypnosis without a hypnotist.

You make a good point. I answer, truly liking her idea and marveling at my own bloodlust. I never contemplated attacking anyone before all this started, and now I’m practically salivating at the idea of pouncing on the unsuspecting therapist. Of course, a moment later I imagine having to tell Sinclair that I bit the hypnotist Gabriel generously vetted for us, and I put the idea to bed. We can’t. I tell her reluctantly. Dominic would be disappointed.

Fine. She grumbles, but I can still feel her violent inclinations pulsing through my blood, sparking my adrenaline and making my heart race. “Ella?”

Gabriel prompts, a note of warning in his tone. I think he can sense the direction of my thoughts, but I send him a withering glare.

“Henry.” I decide, “If he’s free and willing.” The King had been right in assuming that I would feel the most comfortable with Cora if I can’t have my mate, but I’m painfully aware of the possibility that this session might bring up horrors from our childhood that I don’t want her to have to hear or relive.

Gabriel doesn’t move. “If I leave you alone here, are you going to try to harm Leon?”

Now there’s a thought. My wolf pipes up. If Gabriel isn’t here then we could get rid of him before King Nosey gets back, and then there wouldn’t be anything to tattle to Dominic about. Nobody, no crime.

I don’t know.” I answer, turning my nose up. “Why don’t you try and find out.”

“I send a guard.” The King chooses wisely, giving me a scolding stare.

“Why don’t you have a seat, Ella.” Leon advises, seeming entirely unfazed by my aggression. Then again, I suppose he’s used to shifters’ battling their wolves’ base instincts.

A little while later, I’m stretched out on the couch with one hand on my belly and the other clasped in Henry’s large hand. “Don’t worry, Ella. I’ve got you.” He tells me warmly. “If he puts one foot out of line I’ll sick my guards on him.”

“Thank you.” I reply, squeezing his hand. “Will you wake me if you do? I want to watch.”

“Of course.” Henry chuckles, reminding me so much of Sinclair that my heart aches. My mate might not let me lash out at an innocent man unprovoked, but he would certainly take equal pleasure in vanquishing one who crossed me.

“You two are being ridiculous.” Gabriel mutters under his breath.

“Hey, I’m pregnant!” I remind him, thoroughly affronted.

“And I’m disabled.” Henry adds, in an equally offended tone that has me smothering a giggle.

“Neither one of those conditions excuse you from being irrational.” Gabriel declares. “Leon is here to help.”

Henry and I exchange a mutinous glance, silently agreeing to have the guards take out the King as well, should Leon cross a line. I can practically hear Gabriel rolling his eyes, but Leon quickly takes control. “Okay, so what I’m hearing is a lot of anxiety about this process, and that’s okay.” He announces inane. “Ella, I’m going to tell you how this works so you know what to expect. First I’m going to give you a very small injection of a drug called Ether. It’s going to help you relax and open your mind, breaking down the barriers of thought that often lock certain memories or sensations away from your consciousness. It’s completely safe – you can compare it to human psychedelic-guided therapies if you like.”

I can hear him opening plastic packaging, and my fear spirals a bit. No one said anything about an injection. I’m fine with needles, but my distrust of this man makes my wolf recoil at the thought of him putting something unknown into my body.

Maybe I should have asked for Cora after all, since she has medical knowledge I don’t. “It’s okay Ella.”

Henry says softly, clearly reading my resurgence of anxiety. “It’s a common drug in Vanara people use it recreationally too and there’s no danger.”

“Exactly.” Leon confirms. “I’ll check in with you continuously as it kicks in, and then we’re just going to talk. I’ll ask you about your earliest memories, to tell me about your life growing up. I won’t be controlling you or manipulating you in any way, just guiding you through your memories with the help of the Ether. If it gets to be too much, I have another injection that can counteract the first. Otherwise, we’ll let the drug takes its course.

Afterwards, we’ll talk about everything that happened and talk about any tools to help you process your feelings. We’ll go over things we didn’t get to, challenges, things to focus on next time.” He concludes as I watch him finish preparing the shot out of the corner of my eye.

We’ll be working together the whole way. Henry will be taking care of you and also helping me gauge your reactions and mental state since he knows you better. How does that sound?”

Terrible. Not Fun. Bad. Stop this! I think miserably.

This quack doesn’t understand what remembering my life growing up will be like. He doesn’t realize that even simple questions are painful or difficult for me to answer because of how fucked up things were. But I promised my mate, and we need to know where I came from. Still, with all the horrible things I do remember, I don’t even want to imagine how bad something would have had to be for me to repress it. “Is there a chance that we won’t find anything? That there isn’t anything I’ve blocked out?” I inquire, even though I know myself well enough to realize there probably are. I shut out all the bad memories for two decades, so I probably shut out memories too.

“There is.” Leon confirms, “But in my experience, you always learn something new about yourself through this process. Your brain connects the dots of things you already knew in new ways, or allows you to drill down on realizations about your life or experiences. Therapy is always a journey, so I can’t predict what we’ll find, but I can tell you that you will be changed by the end of it.”

I draw in a shaky gulp of air, and I can almost hear Sinclair’s voice in my mind. You can do this.

You’re stronger than you know, little wolf.

Clamping my eyes shut, I nod to Gabriel, prompting him and the guards to leave us alone. “