

Accidental Surrogate for Alpha

Chapter 179

Ella

I've never really done drugs. I experimented in college like most people, and I've partaken at a few parties over the years, but nothing in my limited experience prepared me for the ether. As soon as Leon injects it, I immediately feel it taking control.

The room around me becomes sharper and more blurred, the walls seeming to vibrate with energy. I close my eyes against the strange visual stimuli, and a kaleidoscope of color explodes to life against my eyelids, filling the black void with light. I feel lighter than air, oddly euphoric, and my already sharp wolf senses become even more vivid. In some ways my body feels very far away, yet in others, I can't help but revel in the feeling of the sofa's cloth against my skin, or the new notes I detect in the distant chime of bells in the city.

"How are you feeling, Ella?" Leon inquires, and even his voice sounds different, deeper and more complex.

"High." I admit honestly, peeking my eyes open again and marveling at the way the painting on the wall in front of me seems to be moving.

"That's normal." Leon says, nodding. "Is it a relaxed high or an overwhelming one?"

I pause before answering, feeling as though my brain is on a delay. "It's a little overwhelming." I admit, checking in on the corner of my mind inhabited by my wolf. She's sprawling peacefully, free of the aggression and anxiety that consumed her a few minutes ago. Instead her tongue rolls from her mouth as she stretches and enjoys the sensations flowing through us, even rolling over and rubbing herself against the ground.

I don't need any explanation for my wolf's behavior, because I feel the same languid comfort and ease. My thoughts are quiet, but my body is buzzing with sensation. I snuggle deeper into the cushions, wishing I was in my nest. I consider asking to move – everything there is so much softer and nicer – but somewhere in the back of my head I'm aware that this wondrous state of mind is probably going to be undone by the therapy ahead. I don't want to ruin my safe space by letting something bad happen there. Still, I'm so busy thinking about my lovely nest that I forget I was supposed to be answering a question.

Wracking my brain to recall what Leon had asked, I say, "But I feel a lot calmer than I did a minute ago."

"Good. Let's go ahead and get started." Leon proposes, leaning back in his seat. "Think back for me Ella, what's the first thing you can remember of your life?"

"I don't remember a lot." I confess, preoccupying myself by running my hand over my baby bump.

Not distinctly at least. My childhood is kind of a blur, small flashes and an understanding of things that happened, but few scenes that I can recreate in my head, you know?"

The words come forth much more easily than I can ever remember happening in the past. Normally talking about my childhood is like pulling teeth, dragging the thoughts out of my mind to form stilted words and incomplete sentences. I don't mention that the scenes I do recall in high definition are the ones I want to remember least, the things that scarred me so badly a single sound smell can take me right back to that place. "The earliest thing was probably hunger. My sister crying because of how badly her stomach and head hurt, and me trying to sneak into the kitchens in the middle of the night to find something for her to eat."

"How old were you then?" Leon inquires curiously.

"Maybe four?" I guess, "old enough to have figured out how to sneak out of our dorm, but young enough that I hadn't figured out picking locks yet."

When I got to the kitchen my plan fell apart because it was locked, and then I was caught by the custodian."

"What happened when you were caught?" Leon presses, taking me deeper into the memory.

My high transcends to a new realm then, and it feels as though a door is opening in my mind. I'm not sure I like it – strange feelings rush in, embodying themselves throughout my body in a way that I don't understand. I'm not used to feeling emotions – normally I just think them, aware that/they exist, but unable to manifest them completely. It's almost as if they're trapped in a glass display case.. or they were. Now the glass is shattered around my feet and a lifetime of wants and hurts come teetering out. I try to clench my hands into fists, but I only succeed with one, the other squeezes Henry's hand in a death grip. He moves his free hand to envelop mine from both sides, reminding me that I'm not alone without saying a word.

I suck in a deep breath, and the tightness in my chest eases slightly. I was about to say that I don't remember, but I realize that isn't true. For the first time, I'm able to follow this memory past being caught. "He reported me, and the next day I was put in the punishment box."

"What is the punishment box?" Leon asks, sounding concerned.

"That's just what we called it as kids." I sigh. "It was where they put young children who misbehaved: this tiny room in the basement, with no lights and no windows. They'd lock us inside and leave us in the cramped darkness for hours and hours. There was no food or water, no contact to the outside world. The longest I ever spent there was two days."

"Did anyone outside of the orphanage know?"

Henry questions, sounding suspiciously like his son had when I shared the abuse I suffered with him – like a man determined to find the people responsible and destroy them.

"The children weren't ever really allowed to interact with people from the outside. Sometimes parents would come to see if there were children they wanted to adopt, but we were always told to be on our best behavior- to be seen and not heard."

Cora and I always hid when they came though. We were afraid of being separated." I explain, thinking deeply.

"So you never met anyone from the outside world?"

Leon poses, and though I can tell he's trying to keep the emotion from his voice, I sense a hint of disappointment, as if this fact means we're headed towards a dead end.

"We did later." I inform him, "After we ran away."

And there was once.. " I trail off, feeling as though there's an image hovering on the edge of my consciousness, just out of reach. It reminds me of trying to remember a name or word that's on the tip of your tongue, only this time it's a piece of my own history.

"Are you remembering something, Ella?" Leon says, full of patience.

"I don't... I can't reach it." I huff in frustration.

"Don't try to force it. The harder you work at it the harder it will become." Leon coaches. "Just take some deep breaths for me and let the memory come to you. You were saying that you rarely met outsiders, and you hid when they came. So let me ask you this, if you did meet someone, why was it possible? When did it happen and why didn't you hide?"

"Because they weren't parents." I answer, without even trying. "And they were there for me." I continue, the blurry image becoming clearer in my mind. "I was eleven. It was two men in long robes, and they smelled so strange." I recall. "They were tall and powerful, they gave off this energy that I didn't understand but which frightened me. When I saw them, something inside of me kind of crumpled."

"Keep going Ella. How did you know they were there for you?" Leon encourages.

"Cora and I were getting ready for bed." I answer, not sure where this information is coming from.

It's almost like I'm bringing it to life only after the words are out. As soon as I say it, I can see it in my mind's eye. "The head of the orphanage came into the dorm and everyone scattered. They thought it was he, that she'd come early..." I'm so lost in the memory that I don't pause to explain. "I was the only one who stayed out and the headmaster just smiled. He told me that I must have known I had visitors. They took me out and I was terrified. I knew what happened when people came in the night and took you away. I naturally assumed they wanted to hurt me like the others... and they did, just not in the way I expected."

Henry's hands tighten reflexively on mine, but I can't bring myself to look at him, to see the pity in his eyes. "The headmaster left me alone with the men – he seemed very strange, as if in a trance."

The men sat me down and told me they were priests of a very sacred order. They said... they said I had magic in me and they needed to suppress it so I could stay hidden." My eyes slam open as the memory comes back to me fully. "I think... I think they took my wolf."