

Accidental Surrogate for Alpha

Chapter 189

Ella

After hanging up with Sinclair, I return the King's cell phone and look around at the gathered men."

When does Leon arrive?" I inquire, forcing down a shiver.

"Within the hour." Gabriel replies, solemn-faced.

Though they'd all agreed that the developments back home warranted accelerating my hypnosis sessions, none of them are happy about keeping them secret. I'm not happy about it either, but I'm also dreading another traumatizing visit to my past.

"Before he arrives I think we should take some blood samples from you, Ella." Henry suggests. "I know the doctors in Moon Valley didn't find any genetic matches for you, but there's a chance that we can trace your ancestry by looking at genetic traits which have historically been documented in certain bloodlines. It won't help us if the inherited genes aren't expressed through ancestral phenotypes, but certain markers in your DNA might still allow us to draw important connections"

"But surely that would only work if my ancestors come from a bloodline deemed worth documenting." I object uncertainly. "I mean if I come from a long line of nobodies then there won't be anything to find."

Phillippe, Henry, Gabriel and Roger exchange meaningful glances. They appear to have a full on silent conversation, trading shrugs and expressions as if batting the responsibility of answering back and forth between one another. "

What?" I finally prompt them, feeling exasperated.

"It's just, Ella," Roger sighs, "it's highly unlikely that you come from random nobodies. It's not impossible, but the fact that you survived having your wolf bound and have proven yourself a match for Dominic... that indicated a level of power that has to be passed down over centuries, getting stronger with every generation. It would explain why the Goddess chose you.. she blessed certain wolves with more magic than others from the beginning."

I look between them curiously. "Does that mean that all of you have the same sort of lineage?" I inquire, "Given that you're among the most powerful Alphas alive today?"

"That's exactly what it means." Henry confirms, not sounding the least bit boastful. "The Sinclairs, Gabriel's bloodline, even Phillipps, they're all incredibly distinguished and can be traced back to the first wolves."

I cross my arms over my chest. "That hardly seems then what, you're doomed to be poor and powerless?"

"That isn't how it works." Gabriel chuckles. "Plenty of other traits prove more useful than brute strength, which is why some other bloodlines have died out because so-called weaker wolves outsmarted them. And the fact remains that fair or not, this might hold some clues to your past, so isn't this worth exploring."

Suddenly the little girl who asked me if I'm a princess pops into my head, and I grapple with the discomfort of this idea. "I guess, though I don't think I like the idea of being part of a long line of snobby elites."

"Oh come on," Roger jokes, "we're not all that bad."

I manage a small smile for his joke, but I grumble the entire way through the blood draw. When the doctor departs I try to sneak in a power nap before Leon arrives, much good that it does me. I end up lying awake and staring at the ceiling, dreading the session about to come. I tried to tell myself it would be okay, but I knew better... and I was right.

Half an hour later I'm in the familiar drug-induced stupor of the ether, the world swirling around me in a hallucinogenic haze. Henry's hands are warm around mine, and I try to focus on the good feelings, rather than the walls coming down in my mind.

"All right Ella, last time we were here you recalled being visited by a couple of priests when you were a girl. I understand that was a somewhat traumatic memory for you." Leon begins gently.

"That's putting it mildly." Henry mutters under his breath, and I squeeze his hand to let him know I'm okay.

"Yes." I answer, delighting in the starbursts dancing across my dark eyelids.

"I want to ask you if you ever saw or spoke with those men again?" Leon inquires. "Can you recall meeting other men or women in similar clothing, who spoke about things you didn't understand?"

I breathe deeply and try to focus, recalling their wrinkled faces while trying to hold off the feelings evoked by that particular memory. I'd been ready to say no, but the more I focus on the details of their robes and the timbres of their voices, I realize that isn't true. "Yes." I say, even as I realize it. "I did see them again."

"When?" Leon inquires, as nonchalantly as if we're talking about the weather.

"I... I don't know." I stammer, not really wanting to move deeper into the possibility – after all, if my first incident with them resulted in the binding of my wolf, I'm not eager to find out what might have come next.

"Don't resist the ether, Ella." Leon advises. "Just let it carry you. I know it's not easy, but we need to know this. This is all to help the pack, remember?"

I squeak my assent, trying to refocus myself as he continues, "try to picture the setting. Where were they when you saw them again, what were they doing?"

Flashes of a dark forest burst into my thoughts, followed by the sound of my feet crashing through the undergrowth, my heart pounding in my ears as adrenaline floods my veins. I have to get away. I think frantically. I can't let them catch me! Just keep going, don't stop.

"There's someone chasing me." I gasp, understanding setting in as my breath comes in pants. There is no light in the woods save the moon, and as I race away from the monster at my back, I see the priests standing amidst the towering trees... watching... making no move to help me.

"Try going further back, Ella. Who is chasing you?"

Why did you start running?" Leon prompts, in the same calm tone.

As soon as he says it, I'm transported to a dim alleyway a few miles from the orphanage. I'm thirteen, and it's the first summer that Cora and I attempted to live on the streets. After fleeing the orphanage and the Doctor's abuse, we'd lasted two whole months picking pockets and hustling to keep our bellies full. We'd slowly learned the tricks of the trade – how to stay hidden from the authorities and enterprising gangs who might recruit us; how to hide our shelters out of sight and stay warm on the cooler nights; even how to navigate some of the city's secret closes and corridors to get around.

Everything was fine until this night, when we'd been on our way back to our current home base after breaking into the public bath houses for some stolen showers. Our hair was wet and dripping, and we were giggling up a storm, still riding high on the excitement of our scheme. "I think we should do this at least once a week – their security is so weak I doubt they'll ever notice." I laugh.

"Every week, how about every day!" Cora suggests, her cheeks clean and rosy for the first time in too many days.

"Now that's playing with fire." A deep voice sounded behind us.

We both whipped around, our eyes going wide as we took in the sight of two huge men towering over our slight bodies. "You take risks too often and you're just asking to get caught." The second man agreed, a hungry glint in his eyes.

Cora and I began backing away, both sensing that whatever these men wanted, it wasn't good. My mind was fighting to stay in the present, immediately consumed with the doctor's last attack... the pain, violation and shame of having him on top of me.

"Ella!" Cora shook me back to the present, and the first man offered up a sickly smile. "What a pretty name. Don't be scared, honey, we just want to have a bit of fun."

My first thought was to find some way to lure them away from Cora, and I turned and hissed in her ear, "Run. Run and hide, I'll lead them away."

"Ella no!" She gasped, "I can't -"

"I won't let them catch me, you know how fast I am." I promised. "Now go." Looking uncertain, Cora turned on her heel and darted away. The second man started to go after her, but I reached out a hand to block him. "Wait, you don't need her. Leave her be and I'll do whatever you want."

"Is that so?" The first man asked, smirking. "Do you have any idea what we want, beautiful?"

"I can guess." I replied, trying to make my voice steady while silently counting how many seconds had passed since Cora ran.

"What do you think?" The second man asked.

"Well she'll certainly bring the hirer price, and you know the customers prefer a willing slut." He glanced in the direction Cora had run. "She's gone anyway." He assessed, turning back to me. "Alright girly, why don't you prove yourself to us, otherwise we start looking for your little friend."

I had to hope that Cora had enough time to escape, and I hadn't missed their comment about me fetching a higher price. "Sure," I grinned. "You'll just have to catch me first."