

Accidental Surrogate For Alpha By Caroline Above Chapter 141

Ella

Sinclair is towering over me, his wolf eyes glowing as he watches me work through my feelings. I gnaw on my lower lip as I try to find the bravery to ask him for what I want, and he purrs deep in his chest, cupping my cheek and tugging my lip free of my sharp little teeth. He doesn't rush me, doesn't make demands, he simply lets me process the dilemma and keeps me from breaking my skin with my new fangs. His gentle affection gives the confidence I need, and I shift a bit closer, craving his steady strength.

"Can I please touch you?" I inquire shakily, peeking up at him from beneath my lashes.

"Touch me where?" Sinclair replies, his deep bass vibrating through my overheated body as his lip quirks up.

I feel as though I've been doused in boiling water, and I'm sure he knows it. "Here." I

say, gesturing to the huge hard member between his legs.

"Uh-uh trouble, if you want to do it, you've got to give me the words."

Sinclair replies,

stroking my spine with his free hand. "It's just you and me, angel.

There's nothing to be afraid of."

"Please, Dominic." I try again, licking my lips, "Can I touch... your C-cock."

Part of me wishes the floor would open up and Swallow me whole, but the member in

question pulses as the word leaves my tongue, and I'm amazed to realize

that I have
such a powerful effect on this man. He holds the entire world in his
palm, but one
word from me and his body responds..
“See now, that wasn’t so bad, was it?” Sinclair purrs, gazing down at me
with such
pure adoration that I forget my embarrassment. “Of course you can touch
me, Ella.”
I start slowly, tracing my fingers over his thick length and running my
thumb over the
purple head, curiously exploring the sinewy contours and feeling bolder
by the minute.
I can feel the muscles in Sinclair’s chest and shoulders tense in response
to my
ministrations, but he doesn’t say a word. When I look up I discover that
his eyes are
on my face rather than my hand, and when I close my fist around him he
has to
smother a satisfied groan. I pump my hand up and down the
considerable length,
loving the way his hands tighten on my body in response. Sinclair hisses
in a breath of
air, dropping his head to the curve of my neck and kissing my throat,
breathing in my
scent. “Goddess, I love you.” He mutters, his wolf making the most
delightful grumbly
sounds of contentment and desire. “My mate, all mine.”
I gingerly drop to my knees, and I’m genuinely shocked when Sinclair
goes from
tender affection to sudden foreboding. He tangles his huge hand in my
hair, pulling my
head back, “And just what do you think you’re doing?” He demands
ominously, his
dominance rolling off of his massive form in powerful waves.
I-I was going to use my mouth.” I murmur, suddenly feeling unsure of

myself.

“I don’t recall you asking permission.” He answers, arching a skeptical brow.

My wolf quivers and roils at once, and I notch my chin up defiantly,

“Can I use my mouth?” I say, but my tone is less of a question and more of a challenge. Sinclair’s eyes flash dangerously and he shakes his head, calling my bluff. “Use it

how? Do you want to kiss it?

A wave of pure Alpha power has me shuddering with submissive instinct, and I know

exactly what he wants to hear me say. If I wasn’t so drunk on passion I might not be

brave enough to manage it, but I’m beyond the point of no return now.

“Please

Dominic,” I gasp deliriously. “I want to suck your cock.”

He nods in approval, guiding my lips to the flared tip of his manhood.

“Go on then,

beautiful.” As I swipe my tongue over a bead of moisture emerging from his slit, I revel

in the way I’m able enjoy being complimented. For so long, comments about my looks

only brought my trauma to the surface, but I feel so safe with Sinclair that I’m able to

enjoy being admired the first time in my life.

After lapping my way along his length, I close my lips around the head of Sinclair’s

huge cock, sucking in my cheeks and pulling him into my mouth.

Sinclair hisses with

obvious pleasure, and I feel so utterly powerful. It’s one thing when such formidable

being chooses to get down on his knees for you, and another entirely to bring him

there through your own vigor – to make him lose control with a simple touch.

I slide my lips and tongue up and down his shaft, using every bit of skill I possess to pleasure him.

Maybe it's strange to be so turned on by an act that doesn't offer me any physical satisfaction, but I love seeing how I affect Sinclair. His grip tightens on my hair, and I lift my eyes to his, letting his gaze bore into me as I work my mouth over him.

"Touch yourself, Ella." Sinclair commands, his voice hoarse with barely restrained lust.

"Spread that sweet pussy so I can see how wet you are for me"

I freeze, thrown off balance by the idea of pleasuring myself in front of him. At the same time, my wolf urges me to be brave. It's what he wants, he's going to like it even if you're nervous.

Sensing my unease, Sinclair gives me a low purr of encouragement, and I slowly move my hand to my swollen sex, unsure of whether or not I can go through with this.

I've never touched myself in front of anyone, and part of me is surprised Sinclair would ask for this. When I finally make contact, carefully parting my nether lips for him, he speaks as though he's read my mind.

"That's it, baby." He groans, his hips twitching with the effort of holding himself back.

"This is the only time you get to do this. Your pleasure is my responsibility, so from now on I expect you to tell me if you need affection. But damned if I don't love seeing you make yourself feel good."

I quiver and suck him harder, emboldened enough to play with my sensitive clit. I

whimper around Sinclair's hardness, and he pulses against my tongue, clearly enjoying the vibrations. He's thrusting into my mouth now, beyond the point holding back, so I increase my pace, intent on bringing him off. Sinclair has both hands buried in my hair now, and my excitement only increases. I forget my doubts, pleasuring myself the way I would if I were alone while he thrusts into my mouth. I reach up to grip the base of his cock, squeezing tightly because I know it's beyond the capacity of my small mouth. I work my tongue over the underside of his length, rocking into my hand as I try to focus on satisfying my mate over my own release. After a few minutes Sinclair tenses and swears, "Fuck, stop or I'm going to come." He attempts to pull himself free of my lips, but his admission only drives me to work harder, and I cease touching myself to focus all my energy on him. I surge forward, taking him into my throat and cupping his heavy balls, rotating them between my fingers. Sinclair curses again, fisting his hand in my hair as he explodes with a guttural growl. I swallow him down, determined not to let him down, and Sinclair shakes his head. "Are you trying to kill me, woman?" He inquires, pulling me to my feet.

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#Chapter 142-Claimed

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At first I think Sinclair is angry, but then his lips part in a lethal grin and a growling laugh vibrates in his chest. He slides his hand over my cheek and around my nape, tangling his fingers in my wet hair. “Do you know what it means, to top from the bottom, little wolf?” He inquires ominously, his thumb massaging my neck in steady circles.

“No.” I reply, shifting nervously from foot to foot.

His demeanor is so predatory, so foreboding, and I know I’ve miscalculated in my attempt to hurry him up.

“It’s when you try to get your own way by provoking or manipulating me, using reverse psychology.” He explains darkly, “It’s an attempt to take control from your Alpha, your mate, without them realizing you’re doing it.” Sinclair prowls forward, and I instinctively retreat, moving backwards until my back collides with the tile wall. My heart hammers in my chest, and Sinclair rumbles with satisfaction as he watches me try to cope with his dominance. “I was willing to let you get away with making me come too soon because I know how hard it’s been on your generous heart to always be on the receiving end in the bedroom, but your mischievous wolf needs to know she can’t trick me into doing things her way.”

“And h-how are you going to teach her?” I ask nervously, a shiver racing down my spine when his green eyes flash with some unnamed emotion.

“Well, I was planning on taking things slowly but making it as fun for you as possible.”

Sinclair shares, sliding his knee between my thighs. “Now I think I might just drag it

out, make you work for your pleasure. What do you think about that?”

I’m tempted to roll over and simply accept my defeat, but my traitorous wolf rankles at

his suggestion, I can feel her rising up inside of me, and I revel over how different it is

to exist in this body now that I’m sharing it with a full-fledged wolf. In the past my inner

voice has been a comfort or friend, and more recently a conundrum, now I feel like

she’s at the wheel and I’m merely along for the ride. “I think that’s a terrible idea.” I

hear myself reply, my voice decidedly sullen. “I shouldn’t have to wait at all when I’ve

already been without your mark for so long.”

Sinclair chuckles, reaching behind his body to shut off the shower tap.

He sweeps my

feet off the ground, carrying me out of the shower and not bothering to dry me off

before unceremoniously tossing me into my nest. I hiss and bare my fangs at him for

the offense, but all this does is cause Sinclair to roll me over and pepper my bottom

with swift spansks, holding me in place with a hand on the small of my back. I howl and

protest, but he doesn’t listen.

Despite myself, I can feel heat pooling between my legs, and there’s something so

satisfying about feeling Sinclair take me in hand this way. I blame my wolf – the

ridiculous creature loves his dominance in a way I don’t quite understand, but she and

I are one now. I find my hand trying to sneak down between my legs as he punishes me a jolt of utter rapture pulsing through me when my fingers connect with my clit. Realizing what I'm doing, Sinclair flips me onto my back. "I thought I told you that your pleasure belongs to me, mate." He rumbles, seizing my hand and sliding my fingers into his mouth, licking the wetness from my skin. "I see I'm going to have to take things up a notch." Sinclair pins my hands on either side of my head, "Tell me now, baby. Will you be okay if I restrain you?" Unlike before, his phrasing doesn't trigger my past. Instead it sends my foolish wolf into a fresh fit of rebellion. "I'd like to see you try." I challenge, wriggling against his hold. Before I know it, my wrists and ankles are cinched to the four corners of the bed, and I'm spread-eagle on the mattress, immobile and completely vulnerable. For a second I start to panic, but the moment Sinclair hears my heart rate increase, he rests his palm on my belly and leans over me so I can see his face. "You're okay, trouble. I'm right here. I've got you." My wolf settles, knowing she's safe in her mate's hands, and I submit myself to Sinclair's retribution. "So lovely." He observes, petting my swollen sex. "So slick and sensitive." His thumb works tight circles on my clit as he leans down to tease my nipple with his tongue, and I lift my hips to meet his touch, biting back my needy

moan. I'm already so turned on from the shower and his spanking, so it doesn't take long before I'm teetering on the edge of an orgasm. Unfortunately Sinclair is so tuned in to my body's cues that he senses my imminent peak, and pulls back at the last moment.

I cry out in frustration when his stimulation disappears, whining into the air and glaring at my mate. I know he's planning on doing the same thing over and over again, but this knowledge only makes me more defiant. Sinclair lowers his lips to mine, stealing a kiss as he croons, "Such a fierce little wolf." I nip his lower lip, hard enough to draw blood, and he swats my neglected cleft, obviously not the least bit concerned with the crimson liquid pooling at the corner of his mouth.

Over the next hour, he manages to repeat the same tortuous pattern over and over again. Using his hands and mouth he brings me to the very edge of ecstasy before pulling back at the last second, leaving me disappointed and desperate. I arch into his touch wherever it's offered, eventually begging him for the release he withholds. Still he doesn't give in, continuing his relentless pleasure campaign until I have no more defiance to wield against him.

Only when my eyes are full of tears and my vicious snarls have turned to whimpering moans does he untie my hands and feet from the bed. He rolls onto his back and encourages me to sit astride him. Finally free to climb atop him and seek my own

pleasure, I balk at Sinclair's massive size. I'm not sure if I can take him all, but Sinclair sits up, cupping my face in his hands and stealing breathless kisses from my lips.

"You're in control, baby just this first time." He intimates gruffly. But I only have so much control. If you don't act soon, I'm going to take you whether

you're ready or Being ready isn't the problem, I think wryly. I'm so ready I could

scream. The true issue is whether I can handle such a man, but I suppose the only

option I have is to try. I carefully center the flared head of Sinclair's cock at my

entrance, certain that I'm going to come to pieces the moment he's inside me.

It doesn't actually happen that quickly, because it's Mo easy feat cramming his girthy

length into my tight tunnel. Still, as soon as my hips settle against his, Sinclair rocks

up into my heat, rubbing his cock head against that special spot inside me and setting

off fireworks in my body. All of a sudden the last hour of stimulation crashes over me

in a stunning haze of lust and I detonate around him.

"That's it." Sinclair encourages, beyond caring about anything other than our mutual release. "

Such a good girl, coming all over my cock." I toss my head back and cry out as he lifts

my hips and begins thrusting into me at a relentless pace, even though I'm the one on

top. It doesn't take much to send me over the edge again, and Sinclair's deep voice

and dirty words only egg me on.

"Fuck, you're so tight, baby." He purrs. "I could stay here forever. Night

and day.”

Sinclair kisses his way down my neck, and all I can do is hang on for dear life.

“Perfect, just like that, gorgeous.”

I lose track of how many times I climax, but Sinclair has certainly broken his own

record. At what feels like the end of an eternity, he grazes his fang over the spot

where my neck meets my shoulder and sinks them in deep. I scream as a bright,

white light takes over my vision, blinding me figuratively and literally.

Love, fate and

pure magic intertwine, consuming us both as our bond cements. Before I can think

better of it, I sink my own fangs into the muscles of Sinclair’s pec, staking my own

claim as surely as he’s staked his own.

In the delirious aftermath, I can only float in Sinclair’s protective embrace, finally

feeling complete after so many years of searching. All in all, this feels like a new

beginning for us, and even if it isn’t, surely becoming mates in every sense of the

word gives us a connection that can never be broken. We’re a true team now, and that

has to be an advantage in the upcoming campaign.. right?

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3rd Person

There was a time when Lydia had dreamed about witnessing a Prince’s temper

tantrum – mostly because she always imagined it would be her son, and she would

have been so thrilled to be a mother and queen that she wouldn't have cared about a childish outburst. Seeing a fully grown man, an Alpha she was hoping to seduce, rant and rave was a different thing entirely. Prince Damon had arrived back from the failed meeting with Sinclair to discover that Ella was long gone, and promptly torn her bedroom to shreds in the heat of his anger. Walls punched, curtains torn, furniture toppled and broken – at this point it looked like a tornado had swept through the room, and Lydia was both disgusted and alarmed. She wasn't sure whether she should make her presence known or not. The guards had fetched her after they returned and filled her in on the situation, but Damon's destructive fury worried her. Ella's warnings about the man abusing his mate rung in her ears, and right now she had no trouble believing it. Lydia was furious with herself for not noticing the small army infiltrating the palace, but she'd been preoccupied trying to plan a romantic dinner for the Prince once the ransom was completed. In her mind Damon would have returned to the palace to retrieve Ella once Sinclair agreed to surrender, completed the trade and come home to celebrate with her. However now she was more worried that the Prince would blame her for concocting the plan and missing the invasion. Lydia tried to make herself as small as possible, hovering just inside the doorway and praying to become invisible. He wouldn't kill her.. would he?

The way he was shouting and cursing sounded much like an overwrought toddler, but this man was twice her size and could easily snap her like a twig if he wanted to. What have I gotten myself into? She thought anxiously, true doubt assailing her for the first time.

Right on cue, the Prince whirled around and saw Lydia, cowering with her arms wrapped around her slender body. Her body language reminded him so much of his

late wife that a fresh wave of Wrath slammed into him. He didn't need to be reminded

that his mate had been taken from him, especially not by this schemer.

"You!" He

seethed, jabbing an accusatory finger in Lydia's direction, this is all your fault! Where

the hell were you!"

Her eyes widened, "I-" Before Lydia could say another word, the Prince crossed the

room and slammed her back against the wall, wrapping his powerful fist around her

throat.

"Shut the hell up." He ordered ferociously. "You stupid bitch, you come here bragging

about being able to help me because you know Sinclair so well, but your plans have

done nothing but backfire! I told you he wouldn't give up his campaign that easily! I

told you he would stage rescue!"

Lydia wanted to snap back at him, to tell him he never would have even had the

opportunity to kidnap Ella if it wasn't for her. After all, his rogue attack had failed

miserably, and she'd been able to tell him exactly how Sinclair's

emergency protocols

worked. She was the reason he was getting so much sympathy in the press, the reason his ratings were so high. But she couldn't say any of this, because he was still shouting at her, his claws digging into her throat.

"You've been a pain in my ass since the moment you arrived!" He related, "Honestly, you have some nerve – waltzing in here as if you aren't just the barren reject of a lesser man."

Lydia's jaw dropped, and despite the fact that she could barely breathe, she argued,

"How dare you – that isn't true!"

"Oh give it up!" The Prince countered, a sadistic glint in his eye. He'd always preferred

to inflict physical pain, but there was no denying how pleasurable it could be to

destroy a woman emotionally. "I called your husband, you know. I wanted to rub it in

his face that you'd transferred your allegiance to me and you know what he told me?

He told me that you came slinking onto his doorstep after you left Sinclair, promising

to give him a whole litter of pups and bragging about all your experience as a Luna.

And when he realized you were just a lazy gold digger who couldn't conceive an

original thought – much less a baby, he kicked you to the curb." Damon informed her

maliciously.

"You didn't come back because Sinclair upgraded a younger, prettier she-wolf, you did

it because you had nowhere else to go." Tears burned in Lydia's eyes as the cruel

man taunted her with her worst failures, but this only seemed to egg Damon on. “And I let you stay because I thought, I thought, your knowledge of Sinclair could still hold some value for me, but it turns out you’re as useless a strategist as you were a mate.”

His grip on her throat was getting tighter now, and Lydia dug her fingers into his hand, trying to pry it away so she’d have the space to breathe. “Please.” She begged. “I- I can still help you.”

“I don’t see how.” The Prince scoffed, “if anything you being close to me is weakening public sympathy for me.” He paused, a dawning light overtaking his features as Ella and Sinclair’s clues about Angeline’s murder swirled through his mind. “Why is it that you waited until my campaign was already on the upswing to offer your assistance anyway?”

Lydia’s already pounding heart sped up as she realized Damon was starting to suspect her true ambitions to replace his queen, and the crimes she’d committed in order to make it happen. She knew she had to think quickly, and her mind raced through possible distractions. Like the Prince, there were details hovering at the edge of her consciousness, just out of reach. She knew she had the key to her own survival within reach, she just had to pull the puzzle pieces together. The longer she stayed silent, the angrier the Prince became, but she could risk saying the wrong thing when he was already determined to hurt her.

The Prince’s threatening growls were growing louder and louder, and

Lydia felt his claws break the skin of her neck. Hot, thick blood trickled down her clavicle, and she fought back a whimper instinctively knowing he would enjoy the sound. At the very last moment an idea clicked into place, and Lydia's panicked body relaxed with a sudden confidence that absolutely rankled the seething Prince. Fortunately for Lydia, she forced the words out before he could act on his feelings. "I've got a better question for you." She gasped hoarsely, "Why is it that no one had ever heard of Ella until after she was already pregnant with Sinclair's child? He's the most famous man in the territory and the tabloids follow him constantly, but no one ever heard a single word about him dating someone new. And if Ella is supposed to be a cousin of Aileen Crentin's, why did I never meet her? I was at Aileen and Hugo's wedding, and I can tell you right now that Ella wasn't." She hurriedly explained. "You think they're lying about their relationship?" The Prince blinked, processing this idea. He only gives it a moment of thought before shaking his head. "They said she hadn't known about her relatives here until recently, besides I've never seen a pair of mates more in love." "Then why hasn't he claimed her?" Lydia hissed, something in her gut telling her she was on the right track. "Don't you find it suspicious that they can't keep their hands off each other in public but he's letting her run around unmarked? The most possessive, dominant wolf in the world" Prince Damon's grip loosened slightly, and he rumbled pensively, "So

what, you think

he hired her? That it's all been a show for the campaign?"

"Maybe." Lydia shrugged. "You have to admit it makes sense, things start going bad

for him and all of a sudden he conjures a breeding mate out of the air?

It's more than

a little suspicious."

"You have a point." The Prince nods, his wolf flashing in his eyes.

"Maybe it's time to

call in Roger again."

"Roger?" Lydia scoffed, unaware of just how much Sinclair's relationship had changed

with his brother in recent months. "I've got news for you, Roger is the absolute last

person who Dominic would confide in about his relationship – or politics."

"Then who am I supposed to ask? His men are too loyal to be bribed and the

Goddess knows his security is too tight at the mansion to get a bug in."

The Prince questioned in frustration.

"If Ella is who she says she is then she'll have connections in the Shadow pack, even

commoners have work histories and educations, I think need to verify hers." Lydia

mused aloud, so utterly relieved to have successfully turned her assailant's attention

to the other woman.

"You'd better be right about this." The Prince snarled, abruptly releasing Lydia's neck.

The she-wolf crumpled, trying to steady herself against the wall as her legs gave out.

"This is your last chance, Lydia. One more slip up, and I'll kill you where you stand."

Rubbing her neck, Lydia tried to hide her trembling. "I believe you."

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relatives here until recently,
besides I've never seen a pair of mates more in love."
"Then why hasn't he claimed her?" Lydia hissed, something in her gut telling her she was on the right track. "Don't you find it suspicious that they can't keep their hands off each other in public but he's letting her run around unmarked? The most possessive, dominant wolf in the world" Prince Damon's grip loosened slightly, and he rumbled pensively, "So what, you think he hired her? That it's all been a show for the campaign?" "Maybe." Lydia shrugged. "You have to admit it makes sense, things start going bad for him and all of a sudden he conjures a breeding mate out of the air? It's more than a little suspicious." "You have a point." The Prince nods, his wolf flashing in his eyes. "Maybe it's time to call in Roger again." "Roger?" Lydia scoffed, unaware of just how much Sinclair's relationship had changed with his brother in recent months. "I've got news for you, Roger is the absolute last person who Dominic would confide in about his relationship – or politics." "Then who am I supposed to ask? His men are too loyal to be bribed and the Goddess knows his security is too tight at the mansion to get a bug in." The Prince questioned in frustration. "If Ella is who she says she is then she'll have connections in the Shadow pack, even commoners have work histories and educations, I think need to verify hers." Lydia

mused aloud, so utterly relieved to have successfully turned her assailant's attention to the other woman.

"You'd better be right about this." The Prince snarled, abruptly releasing Lydia's neck.

The she-wolf crumpled, trying to steady herself against the wall as her legs gave out.

"This is your last chance, Lydia. One more slip up, and I'll kill you where you stand."

Rubbing her neck, Lydia tried to hide her trembling. "I believe you."

#Chapter 144 – Ella Begs for Mercy

Ella

When I wake, my body is filled with the most exquisite soreness. My hand immediately leaps to my neck, where Sinclair's mark is seared into my skin.

Being claimed was the most intense experience of my life, and it feels remarkably as though Sinclair and

I are no longer separate people, but two halves of the same whole. His big body is wrapped around me as he dozes, and I'm amazed to realize I can sense his inner

Wolf's pride and satisfaction even while he rests.

I can't really explain how the bond feels. In some way it's like my bond with the baby,

except instead of flashes of hazy emotion I can constantly sense Sinclair's feelings, in

a deep form of empathy that is confusing and overwhelming at times. Our hearts beat

in perfect sync now, and I know we can communicate telepathically when we choose,

even though we haven't had the chance to test this particular gift. So far we haven't

done anything but make love. In fact my new mate woke me up three times during the night to take me again, and my poor sex is so swollen and sensitive that I'm afraid of Sinclair waking up and lavishing more attention on my exhausted body.

I try to sneak out of bed while he sleeps, but his powerful arms tighten around me, and then there's a low rumble in my ear. "And just where do you think you're going?"

"Just to the bathroom." I lie, realizing at once that this is a mistake. If I can sense Sinclair's feelings then he can certainly sense mine.

"Tsk, tsk," He clucks, rolling me onto my back and looming above me. His voice is stern but there's only love, amusement and desire in his eyes. As soon as I see these emotions, I feel them as well, blended with my own and yet entirely distinct.

Lying to your new mate already, trouble?" Sinclair teases, caressing my cheek. "And trying to sneak away from me?"

"I thought you'd try to be intimate if I woke you." I explain, only slightly sulky.

"Be intimate?" Sinclair repeats, a devilish glint in his emerald eyes. "You mean you thought I'd try to rut your sweet pussy again." I blush and shiver, certain I'll never get

used to hearing him speak this way. It scandalizes me and turns me on all at once,

and I know that's why he does it. If only I could hide my reaction from him – but that's

more impossible than ever now. "Well was I wrong?" I demand indignantly. "I'm too

sore to take any more of your wolf's affection, Dominic."

Sinclair's brow furrows and he sits up completely, "Baby, why didn't you say so?" He moves between my legs and gently rumbles when I try to clench them shut. "Come on, let me see, sweetheart."

I don't trust the sly wolf's intentions, and when I try to sense his emotions through our bond in order to decipher whether or not this is a trick or genuine concern, I realize I can't. "How are you doing that?" I inquire curiously, more than a little intrigued to realize there might be a way to shield my feelings from my mate. "You can learn to withhold some things from your mate, but it takes practice." Sinclair answers huskily, prying apart my thighs with no trouble at all. "Though I'm not sure I want to tell you how." He adds wryly.

I clamp my hand over my center, my suspicions raised. "And why are you hiding your feelings from me now?" I inquire, now convinced this is all just a scheme.

A rush of worry assails me, and I relax slightly. "It's an old habit." Sinclair shares reluctantly, "It's not in my nature to let others feel my anxiety, especially not my mate."

He tenderly pulls my hand away so he can examine my abused flesh, purring sympathetically and crooning when he sees how red and swollen I am. "Poor little wolf."

He murmurs, carefully spreading my lips so he can take a closer look, "I've been too rough with you, haven't I?"

No! My wolf exclaims, and Sinclair's masculine smirk tells me I've just managed to

successfully communicate telepathically. I roll my eyes at the silly canine, who loves his dominance too much to risk him going easy on us. So I sassily add, This is just what happens when you try to shove a battering ram into a keyhole. Sinclair chuckles, his hot breath fluttering over my exposed skin. Poor, mistreated mate. His voice sounds in my head, cursed with an Alpha too well endowed for your little body to take. Amusement is heavy in his voice, and he arches a brow at me as he continues. Though I didn't hear you complaining when you were coming all over me last night. I giggle despite myself, because he's right and both know it. I love how small and delicate I feel beside Sinclair, even if those values are misplaced by the human society that raised me, and I've certainly enjoyed myself with him in bed. My thoughts are interrupted when Sinclair moves his mouth dangerously close to my body. Here angel, let me kiss it better. Alarms go off in my brain, but then it's too late. Sinclair's talented tongue swipes up the length of my sex, lapping up the wetness accumulated at my entrance and flicking over the tiny bundle of nerves at the apex of my mound. "Dominic no- ohhh." I exclaim, sighing as a fresh wave of heat consumes me. A moment ago I thought my clit might fall off if Sinclair touched it, but the pain he invokes is edged with a deep pleasure I don't understand. I abruptly realize that the

worry he'd shared with me is long gone, replaced only with cunning and triumph.

With his mouth occupied, my mate continues using our mind link.

The sound of his

dark laughter fills my head, soon followed by the words, I wasn't lying about sharing

my worries, but perhaps I left out the fact that you can also learn to project things that

aren't there, or only reveal some feelings while keeping others hidden.

I'm panting as he continues lavishing affection over my sex, my fingers tangled in his hair

as confused, needy whimpers are dragged from my lips. Still, his words manage to

penetrate the haze of lust and disorientation consuming my mind, and I feel a burst of

relief. I'm immensely glad to know that I'll still be able to surprise and trick my mate,

just as he's done to me now.

Another rumbling laugh sounds in my thoughts, You've got a long way to go before

you'll be able to pull one over on me, mate. But I'd be lying if I said I'm not excited to

see you try.

You just want an excuse to spank me again. I answer, trying and failing to sound

offended by the idea.

Sinclair pauses his ministrations to look up at me, his eyes glinting with lethal hunger.

Damned straight.

When Sinclair is finished having his wicked way with me, I leap out of bed and pull on

my robe, putting as much distance between myself and the bed as possible. Sinclair

blinks, realizing I'm no longer sprawled like a ragdoll over his

chest, before narrowing his eyes at me, “I don’t recall giving you permission to leave my arms, little one.”

“You stay away from me.” I order, pointing at him and trying to sound firm. “My body is off limits until it’s had a chance to recover, is that clear?” Sinclair smirks, and I realize I’ve essentially managed to challenge him. He rises from the bed and begins prowling towards me. “Is that so?”

“Dominic, I’m serious.” I say earnestly. “I’m exhausted. I haven’t gotten out of bed all day and I already need a nap. Think of the baby.” I encourage, knowing that if this doesn’t work, nothing will.

Sinclair searches my face, then softens visibly. He reaches for me, and I hesitantly go to him. “I’m sorry, my love.” He purrs, snuggling me close. “My wolf just finds it difficult not to get carried away with you. Have a lie down and I’ll bring you something to eat.”

My stomach growls right on cue, and I detect a pulse of guilt from Sinclair. He feels like he’s been neglecting me, and as pleased as I am to know my body is safe from another onslaught of lust, I can’t stand this. I send every bit of denial in my heart straight back at him. “Dominic, I can’t thank you enough for everything you’ve done for me these last few days. You saved my life again, you took care of me through the worst day of my entire life – the worst emotional and physical pain I’ve ever known. You forgave me even when we thought I’d killed our baby.” I continue, my voice breaking as I recall that pain. “You’ve done the exact opposite of

neglecting me.” I
proclaim passionately, “I love you so much, and I’ve been in such
heaven the last 24
hours, I just need a break.”
Sinclair cuddles me closer. “Thank you, sweetheart,” He
professes tenderly. “But
there’s one thing we need to get straight. I love our pup more than
life itself, but if I
had to choose to save one of you over the other, it wouldn’t even
be a question for
me. We can make another baby, but I can’t make another you.”
My heart feels full to bursting, and some of the guilt that has been
gnawing at me
since I was forced to make that terrible decision fades away. I
realize that I’d been so
afraid of losing Sinclair for trying to save my own life, especially
after we’d started out
our relationship deeply opposed over my consideration of an
abortion. Something
cracks open inside of me, and the next thing I know I’m crying out
all the pain and fear
– the trauma of everything I’ve just survived and the joy as well.
Sinclair purrs and
rocks me in the safe cradle of my nest, and I realize he’s crying
too. The last few days
have been a gauntlet for us both, and we desperately need the
catharsis.
Unfortunately, our healing is cut short when Hugo walks in a little
while later, a grim
expression on his face. “We’ve got a problem.”

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Chapter 145 – Damage Control

Sinclair

As soon as Hugo walks into the room, I thrust Ella behind me, a vicious snarl on my lips. My wolf is on high alert from having claimed his mate so recently, his possessive instincts spinning out of control and stronger than I've ever experienced. She's mine. He thinks angrily, He shouldn't even be allowed to look at her. I can't even process my beta's words, because I'm too preoccupied with guarding Ella – despite the fact that I know my old friend isn't any threat. Still there's no reasoning with a protective wolf, and all mine knows is that another male is in the vicinity of my precious, breeding mate. Ella, troublemaker that she is, only wriggles her way back into my lap, putting herself between me and the target of my wrath. She pulls my glowing eyes down to her own, both of her small hands framing my face. I glower at the insolent creature, not all pleased that she's stopping me from attacking the interloper, but Ella stares back with unwavering calm. Stop being ridiculous. Her silken voice sounds in my head. It's only Hugo, and I don't have eyes for anyone but you. It's not your eyes I'm worried about. My wolf replies grumpily. He'd be a fool not to want you and he can't have you. I lower my mouth to her fresh, red mark, breathing in her scent and gently nibbling her tender skin. Mine, mine, mine. A noticeable shiver runs down Ella's spine, and my wolf puffs out his chest with masculine pride. Naughty mate, I rumble, positively crowing when she shudders again and

the scent of her arousal wafts up to me. Her body might be exhausted, but her wolf is as insatiable as my own. Challenging me, pretending to be all can and reasonable when you crave my dominance every bit as much as I need to exert it. Come on, let me bite him just a little – a warning bite, so he remembers who you belong to. You're impossible. Ella's amused voice accuses, tempting me to turn her over my knee and remind her who's in charge. If I want to attack my Beta, who is she to stop me? Doesn't she realize how special she is, how invaluable? Besides, he said there was a problem. We need to hear him out – what if the Prince is getting ready to stage another attack. He must be furious that we thwarted his plan. This thought brings reason crashing down, subduing my wolf and focusing my attention back on Hugo, who's been watching our silent exchange with understanding but also quickly waning patience. "What is it?" I demand, snuggling Ella a little closer. "We just got a report that the Current is getting ready to publish a story about Ella's background." Hugo announces, referencing one of the few newspapers in Moon Valley that aligns politically with the Prince. "Apparently the Prince sent his spies to the shadow pack to investigate her past... and they figured out that we've been lying about her identity. They don't know she's a human, but they know we haven't been honest." "What?" I hiss, horrified and devastated by the fear and guilt I feel

radiating from Ella. I instinctively begin to purr, but when I look down at my mate she's frozen in place, her beautiful gold eyes wide with horror. "How did this happen?" "I don't know." Hugo sighs, "If I had to guess I'd say this is another of Lydia's schemes – because of the timing if nothing else."

I let out a volley of ferocious swears, interrupting my purring and startling Ella. My wolf whines in regret and I move my hand to her round belly, checking on our pup. I feel a tiny pulse of unease, and immediately resume my purrs, not speaking again until both mother and child have relaxed. "I should have killed that bitch when I had the chance."

I continue a moment later, "What's the Current's angle?" Hugo looks reluctant to speak, but eventually he says, "that you've been running a morality campaign and the entire time you've been lying to the people and the Alpha council. They're suggesting your entire relationship is a fraud and that Ella is a paid surrogate – they want to know if you have a comment."

"Can we stop it?" I ask. I own some shares in the paper, but I'm afraid that my economic holdings won't do much good if the pack turns against me. "Do you know if anyone else has hold of the story?"

"Not yet." Hugo relates grimly, "And I don't think there's anything we can do to convince them not to print it. They have proof that Ella and Aileen aren't related and that no one with her name ever resided in the territory."

"Damn it." I murmur, trying to wrap my head around this.

"Dominic, what do we do?" Ella looks up at me with so much trust

and hope, and I realize that she's looking to me for the answer – the solution. This incredible woman, who has only ever been able to rely on herself and fix her own problems, trusts me so much that she's giving me that responsibility. I can't let her down. "Well..." I begin slowly, working through the possibilities. "The way I see it, we have three options. We can try to get ahead of the story and release it ourselves – say that Ella was a suppressed wolf and our love is real but we hid her past because we were trying to figure out how to wake her wolf. We can deny it, but if we do then they'll probably start looking closer to home – working backwards to discover how Ella and I met and come to the conclusion that she's a human. We can disprove that now, but it will be even messier if they figure out the truth and we've spent all this time insisting the story is false. Or we can simply say no comment, and hope that the story doesn't make an impact."

"But it will make an impact – you know it will." Hugo counters seriously. "The other papers will pick it up when they see the evidence, and your refusal to acknowledge the reports will only allow the Prince and anyone else who opposes you to make up more and more outlandish accusations." He paces back and forth while I absentmindedly croon and pet Ella, who has tears in her eyes for a very different reason than she did a little while ago. I hate that our nascent joy is already coming to

pieces... I hate that she's known nothing but fear and stress since coming into my life and that yet again, I can't protect her the way I want. The way she deserves.

"I think our only move is to try and get ahead of the story, control the narrative by framing things ourselves." Hugo advises, looking worried despite his confident tone.

"The pack will be more outraged if they think your relationship is fake, than they will if they believe you were just trying to protect your mate when she couldn't access her wolf."

"I think Hugo is right." Ella pipes up, her voice hoarse. "We can spin this in our favor only as long as we get the word out first."

I know they're correct. The problem is that I have a terrible feeling that this scandal might be my downfall. In many ways the Current's reporters are telling the truth. I

have been running a campaign on the basis of honesty and virtue, and I have been

lying to everyone in the interest of winning. Does it matter that my motives were

noble? That my only interest in being King is to keep a tyrant off the throne? That I

never asked for this duty, but I'm not going to shirk the responsibility that comes with my power?

My stomach is in knots, but I slowly nod, knowing that this is the only path forward,

even if it leads to a dead end. "Call a press conference." I instruct Hugo. "We'll say

we're announcing Ella's claiming, that her wolf has been dormant but with the help of

the pack elders, we were able to wake it. If they ask about her past we'll admit that we don't have any answers, and we're just thrilled that we've finally found each other and that we're welcoming a son. And if they accuse us of playing politics, we'll say that I believed Ella would have become an even bigger target if people knew how vulnerable she was."

"And the Prince?" Hugo asks, fully aware of the conversation I had with my father before we went to rescue Ella. "Do you want to come out in the open about his misdeeds – distract the press by claiming he was already trying to kill Ella and the babe, that the only reason you risked waking her wolf while she was pregnant was because he kidnapped her?" For the first time in a very long time, I'm passed caring about taking the high road. The Prince has been getting away with his crimes for far too long, and it's time the people knew about it. "Fuck it." I growl, squeezing the sweet bundle in my arms, "Let's do it."

#Chapter 146 – Press Conference

Ella

Dominic, I'm scared. I confess, speaking through our bond. It hadn't been easy to convince him to let me join the press conference, since I'm technically still supposed to be on bed rest. My blood pressure was still too high when we checked it this afternoon, but it remains to be seen whether that's because of my condition or the

stress of the pack finding out about our lies. I've been hoping that the preeclampsia was just a side effect of my wolf being trapped, but what good will that do if our lives fall apart the moment she's freed? I know, baby. Sinclair purrs, rubbing my back. But I've got you. I'm going to take care of you no matter what happens. I nuzzle his chest, finding that spot where his scent is the strongest and pressing my nose to it. I breathe in his wonderful scent, taking comfort in his presence and powerful embrace. I know. I tell him, my wolf rising to the surface and taking control of my words, cuz I have the strongest mate in the whole wide world... so handsome, so powerful and caring. Sinclair's warm chuckle fills my head, and for one blissful moment, I forget why I was upset in the first place. Sinclair is like a ray of sunshine on the darkest day, and that sensation only gets stronger the deeper our connection grows. I am still falling for this man, I realize with surprise. Despite the fact that I keep thinking I couldn't possibly fall any deeper in love with him, my heart continues to prove me wrong. It seems like every time I think I've reached the bottom of the well, it falls away and introduces me to a new layer of complexity and emotion. Silly mate, Sinclair murmurs, and I realize I've been unintentionally projecting my thoughts at him again. I feel myself beginning to blush, but when I look up at him,

there's only profound understanding on his rugged features. Don't you realize there is no limit – no end to this bond? We're going to keep falling harder and deeper every day together, and we have a lifetime to learn all the different ways we can adore each other.

My heart melts as his words hit home, and I squeeze his middle tightly. It probably feels like nothing to him, but I'm using all my strength. I want him to feel the sheer force of my appreciation for him, and he doesn't leave me hanging. I feel it, trouble.

Don't worry. If I were an outsider observing us right now, I'd probably think we were silly – drunk on our own romance... and maybe we are, but I can't bring myself to care because I'm not on the outside looking in. This is my life and I'll be damned if I'm going to deny myself this joy – not when I've worked so hard and been through so much to reach this place.

The baby flutters in my womb, and his own happiness in response to our lovey dovey exchange fills me with hope and optimism. We can get through this. I decide, taking strength from my pup and his father. I don't even have to worry about explaining my train of thought to Sinclair, because I'm sure he's felt every step of my feelings journey through our bond. This press conference is just another bump in the road, if we can survive rogue attacks and kidnappings, we can survive a few reporters.

I pull back when Sinclair doesn't respond. I can still feel his

outpouring of love, but I realize I can't sense how he's feeling about the imminent conference. Dominic? I ask hesitantly. Am I wrong? Does he think his campaign won't be able to recover from this?

We're going to fight. He tells me, implying his doubts without actually admitting them.

If they want to take down our campaign, we're not going to make it easy for them...

and no matter what happens, we'll get through it. I'll keep you safe Ella.

I feel myself tremble with unease, despite my faith in my mate. If he's anxious enough

to hide it from me, we must be in more trouble than I realized.

Hugo walks in, his

grave expression only increasing my worry. "It's time."

A sea of reporters spans out in front of us, cameras rolling, recorders held aloft and

pens poised to write down every word we speak. As far as I know, no one knows why

we've called this conference, so right now the tension in the room is limited to Sinclair,

Hugo and I. My mate's arm is secured around my waist, his hand splayed over my

belly as I lean into his side.

'Thank you all for coming out today.' Sinclair begins, nodding to the various media

figures. "Ella and I have an announcement to make, as well as a confession. It pains

me to tell you that we haven't been completely honest about Ella's past, because the

truth is that when we met and fell in love, her wolf was dormant."

Muttering explodes

throughout the room, and a number of hands shoot into the air.

Still, Sinclair continues
in the same steady tone.

“We’re not sure how it was able to stay suppressed for so long, only that she was surrendered by her parents to a human orphanage here in moon valley when she was just a baby.” The shockwaves Sinclair’s words send throughout the room are visible and visceral, and I recall the details he shared with me about the value of shifter children in their society – the neglect such an act would be. “My incredible mate suffered greatly in the hands of the abusive system, forming her own pseudo pack at a young age, and constantly sacrificing herself to protect the other children from harm.”

Sinclair pauses to kiss my temple, apparently unable to speak about my childhood traumas without offering me affection. For the first time I’m able to feel his wolf’s fury and vicarious pain for the things I went through, and I’m astonished by the scale and severity of his feelings about it all. I can’t help but nuzzle his shoulder, earning myself another kiss. The press all seem too thrown off guard to know what to do, but a few appreciative murmurs reach my ears.

“Ella has always been an Alpha female without ever realizing it, and when we met her wolf finally started to emerge. Until very recently, we believed that it wouldn’t be possible to wake her wolf without harming our baby, so we decided to wait until after our son arrives to attempt it.” Sinclair explains, his voice as deep

as I've ever heard it. I know what's coming next, and I can only hope that it will pay off. "I've been greatly concerned about Ella's safety throughout this campaign and with good reason – my brave Luna has survived multiple attacks orchestrated by the opposition, becoming a target after the news of her pregnancy was released." Every hand in the room is now up, and our rabid audience is running out of patience. Sinclair has to raise his voice over the volley of questions in order to be heard. "Most recently, the rogue attack on the city was designed and carried out by Prince Damon. It started as an attempt to make me look weak, and was later used as a distraction so that the Prince could kidnap Ella and hold her hostage. The Prince rang the all-clear notification early to bring Ella out of hiding, then intercepted her when she attempted to return home – killing all but one of her guards in the process." Every reporter in the room is shouting now, but Sinclair growls with pure Alpha authority and they quickly pipe down. "I will answer questions once I've completed my statement." He appeases them. "The Prince attempted to force me to end my campaign to be King as ransom for my mate, but he underestimated Ella. She escaped her captivity only to find herself alone and unprotected in the mountains North of the valley, with no way to reach me. When I finally found her she was frostbitten and near death, having waited until the last possible moment to try to save

herself by waking her wolf. She took a sacred herb provided to us by pack elders just before I arrived, and went through her first shift thinking we'd lost our son.

Fortunately this was not the case, and are pup is safe and sound, continuing to grow stronger in his mother's womb." i

"My public silence since the rogue attack was caused by my mate's kidnap, then getting her through the shift, and finally claiming her the way we've both been

dreaming about for so long. I realize the things I'm telling you are shocking, and I can

only offer my deepest apologies for my dishonesty. I assure you that I would never have lied to you if I felt I had a choice.

These last months have been incredibly difficult for Ella and I, and though we are

overjoyed to finally be bonded mates, we couldn't in good conscience continue to let

you believe a lie that was no longer necessary, or to remain in the dark about the kind of ruler Prince Damon would be."

He gazes around at the stunned audience with the air of a predator about to pounce,

and I have to fight back the urge to smile. "I'm pleased to report that we finally have

proof of his crimes, so my question for you is whether you'd like to move on to

questions – or would you like to see the evidence against him?"

#Chapter 147 – Evidence

Ella

The room erupts with noise, as various reporters cry out, "What evidence!?"

Sinclair nods to the side door, and his father wheels into the room, followed by a group of grief-stricken she-wolves and my surviving guard.” The evidence is the lives the Prince stole to kidnap Ella, the widows who don’t even have the ability to lay their husbands to rest because he hid their husband’s bodies. The children Damon rendered fatherless in pursuit of the throne. The evidence is the eye-witness testimony of Ella and her guard, of myself and my men when we met Damon to set the ransom. The evidence is the all-clear chime everyone in the valley heard even though the battle was still waging on their television screens. The evidence is my father’s paralysis, which was the result of an attack orchestrated by the King during his own campaign – a strategy he clearly taught his son.”

The door opens again, and a number of shackled rogues are brought into the room, looking furious and sullen. ‘The evidence is the rogues Damon hired to attack his own people, whose financial records show lump sum deposits from off-shore bank accounts just before the battle. It’s even in the Prince’s inaction when the people he claims to love were under attack. And for anyone who might discard the testimony of these people for being my allies or in compromised positions, then I offer you the video footage of the Prince arriving at our hostage meeting, unbeknownst that Ella had already escaped and I was on my way to find her.’

Sinclair and I move away from the podium to give the room full

view of the screen against the back wall, where a black and white image has suddenly appeared from a projector mounted on the ceiling. When Sinclair told me that he'd sent a few enforcers to the second ransom meeting to observe the Prince and notify him of the other man's movements, he hadn't mentioned that he'd also had them transmitting footage of the set up to Roger, or that his brother had recorded it. I'm honestly not sure he remembered, as chaotic as everything has been, because it wasn't until Roger offered the footage after learning about the press conference that he even realized it might be useful as evidence.

As the feed begins to play, a timestamp appears on the bottom corner of the screen, revealing the date for the audience. The Prince is shown with an army at his back, pacing back and forth in frustration through what appears to be an abandoned warehouse. "Where the hell are they?" He demands, 'They should have been here by now!"

"Sinclair's probably just trying to set up his own perimeter." His second in command suggests.

'Then why haven't any of our lookouts sighted him?" Damon hisses. "No, I don't like it. Something is off here."

"You think it's a trick, or a trap?" The beta inquires, rubbing his jaw thoughtfully.

The Prince stomps his foot. "I told her! I told that dumb bitch he wouldn't just give up

his campaign – even for his mate. He’s up to something.”
“But what, a rescue? An Ambush?” The other man presses, clearly agitated by his Alpha’s foul mood.
“Maybe both.” The Prince growls. “Move out, and I want eyes on the girl right now, get in touch with the sentries we posted outside her room.”
The video goes dark as the Prince and his army exit the warehouse, but from the heavy silence in the room, it seems as though the footage was compelling enough to give our critics pause. I admit I’m amazed about how damning the scene was, despite being so brief. They actually managed to catch the Prince referencing Sinclair by name, as well as the ransom. No one might have said my name, but it’s difficult to find another explanation than the one we’ve provided.
The utter stillness is shattered after a pregnant pause, as all the reporters seem to come back to their senses at once. They surge to their feet, shouting questions over one each other in such a way that it makes it impossible to hear. Sinclair leads me back to the podium, pointing towards a man in the front row.
“Alpha, if there have been other crimes then why haven’t you ever accused the Prince before now?” He asks eagerly.
“For a long time Damon and I have been caught in a shadow war. I’ve known what the Prince is capable of for years, which is why I’ve been so devoted to opposing him. Still, it wasn’t until Ella came on the scene and he realized he might lose that he started to escalate his tactics. My father taught me that you don’t

make accusations of this sort with evidence, and until now, I've only had my wolf's instincts to rely on. This is the first time I've had the proof to bring our war out in the open, but trust me when I tell you that I haven't let his offenses go unchecked. My strategy might be different, but I've defended this pack and my family with force when required, and done everything in my power to keep Moon Valley safe." 1

There's another uproar, and then Sinclair points to another reporter for the next question. "Ella, how did you escape the Prince? Were you mistreated when you were his captive?"

I'm slightly startled to be addressed directly, but Sinclair gives me an encouraging

squeeze. I take a steadying breath, "The Prince kept me in the Royal Palace, and I

was able to contact Dominic through a dream

"Because she's the cleverest, most resourceful she-wolf I've ever met." Dominic

praises me, puffed up with Alpha pride.

"Not now, Dominic." I sass, pushing at his scruffy jaw as he tries to kiss me again. He

rumbles in warning and I shiver, sending a wave of laughter through the crowd.

"Anyway, I told him where I was and he explained about emergency evacuation

tunnels in the Palace and how to find them. Luckily I was able to find one in my room,

but unfortunately it was incredible long and landed me in the wilderness very far away

– as my mate said."

I look around at the curious faces before continuing, trying to

decide how to explain my new traumas. “And the worst part about being held hostage came before and after. I was devastated when my guards were killed... I tried to prevent it, to save them but it didn’t do any good, and after “How?” Someone shouts, “I thought your wolf wasn’t awake yet so how did you defend them?”

I freeze for a moment, and my surviving guard steps up, emotion thick in his voice.

“She sacrificed herself for us, thinking they would stop the attack once they had her. I was only able to get away because they thought I was dead.”

#Chapter 148 – The Prince’s Fury

3rd Person

Prince Damon stared at the television screen, apoplectic with rage. He didn’t know how Sinclair found out about the story he’d leaked to the Current, and he didn’t really care. The end result was the same: Here was the Moon Valley Alpha and his wretched little Luna on live TV, accusing him of corruption and murder. What was worse, the reporters were eating it up without any semblance of concern for the lies Sinclair had been telling these last few months. The Prince’s own investigators hadn’t figured out that Ella had been living as a human all these years, and now it seemed there wouldn’t be any need for them to continue digging, because she was about to explain how this all began.

The glowing she-wolf exchanged a nod with her mate, before

turning back to the crowd. 'The truth is that the beginning of our relationship is a mystery to us both. We were both desperate for children, after years of trying and failing with our partners. I didn't know it at the time, but I wasn't conceiving because I was with a human, and long story short, I went to a sperm bank thinking it was my last chance to get pregnant. Dominic had sent his own sperm there for analysis, and somehow it ended up getting mixed up with the sample from the donor I'd chosen.' "When Dominic scented his heir in my womb a few days later, we didn't understand how I was able to conceive a shifter's child, and now of course the mystery is who or what led to that fateful mix up, because we might not have created this baby the traditional way, but we fell in love so fast and fiercely that there's no doubt it was meant to be." She explains, her silken voice full of warmth as she gazes up at the Alpha in question. "All we can say is the Goddess works in mysterious ways." Excited mutters about the goddess and fate wove throughout the room, and Prince Damon gripped the back of the sofa so hard that his claws ripped into the upholstery. This was unbelievable. Why didn't anyone care that they had been lying all this time – they'd just confessed they didn't even know each other when the bitch conceived and the press was still fawning all over them. Romantic fools! He thought bitterly. What was wrong with this species? So brainless that they could be

swayed by starry eyed fantasies and fairy tales about the Goddess.

He shut the television off when one of the reporters obsequiously cried, "When did

you realize you were in love?"

"Bring Lydia to me, right now." He ordered the guard beside him,

"Then tell my father

to clear his schedule. We need to talk."

When Lydia walked in a little while later, her demeanor skittish and uncertain, he could

only growl wordlessly. "What's happened?" She asked, clearly balking.

"Sinclair's outmaneuvered us again. He just announced that Ella's wolf was dormant

and that he lied about her past to protect her." The Prince

explained. "Then he

accused me of planning the rogue attack and kidnapping her, and he had footage of

the second meeting!"

Lydia's eyes widened in horror, and she began backing away from him warily. "The

current must have called them for a comment on the story."

"A comment! A comment!" Damon ranted. "And you didn't think that Sinclair would

take the opportunity to beat us to the punch! Nobody even cares that they lied

because he turned it into a fucking romantic comedy! I told you that this was your last

chance, you stupid cow!"

"But it wasn't my fault!" Lydia cried, fear rolling off of her in waves.

"All I've ever done

is try to help you!"

"I never would have kidnapped Ella if it wasn't for you – they would never have had

that footage, Sinclair would have continued to quietly counter us

in private if we hadn't
pissed him off so much!" The Prince thundered, stalking Lydia
across the room, his
wolf glowing in his eyes. "You've done nothing but screw things
up from the first
moment you walked into my life, and now you've ruined any
chance I had at being
King!"

"Then I'll leave!" Lydia offered frantically, correctly sensing the
mortal danger she was
facing. "I'll go away and you'll never hear from me again, you
have my word."

Women. Damon mused bitterly. Always so eager to stick their
noses where they don't
belong, but never willing to take responsibility for their actions.
Never willing to get
their hands dirty themselves. In that moment, the hints Ella had
dropped about the
Princess's murder suddenly clicked in Damon's mind. Poison. He
thought, that's why
Ella said it was a feminine tactic, because it's passive. Maybe it
was the way Lydia
was cowering in front of him, but Ella's next clue suddenly
seemed only too obvious.

Who would benefit from her death?

Understanding crashed into Damon, and suddenly all of Lydia's
actions since she had
inserted herself into his world made sense. He realized that she'd
always attached
herself to powerful men, bouncing from one to the next every time
they became wise
to her treachery. "But you don't have anywhere to go, do you?"

The Prince responded
in a snarl. "Your husband tossed you to the curb, Sinclair rejected
you. You've never

worked a day in your life, it must have seemed like a golden opportunity when I suddenly became single, right when you were on the verge of losing everything. In fact, that was quite some coincidence, wasn't it?"

Lydia trembled violently as the Prince moved nearer, circling like a bird of prey. She turned as he moved, afraid to let him out of her line of sight. "W-what do you mean?"

'Well it strikes me that she was killed in a woman's restroom. And no male wolves were scented around her body." He reasoned sharply. "And poison ... such a nonconfrontational weapon."

"Listen, I know what you think, but it isn't true." Lydia stammered. "You're letting them trick you. I know Ella put these ideas in your head."

'The only way you could know that is if you were eavesdropping." Damon accused angrily. "And they're not the only ones who have been trying to manipulate me." He continued, thinking of Sinclair's comments about Lydia's interference. He might be a despicable, self-righteous, mongrel – but he hadn't been wrong about his ex-wife's insolence. "You probably thought you could make me fall for you eventually, if you played your cards right. Tell me, did you want to help me or yourself, Lydia? Did you care if I became King, or did you just want to be a queen and you were willing to go through anyone and anything that stood in your way?"

"It wasn't like that!" Lydia insisted desperately. "And besides, Angeline's death helped your campaign more than all of your efforts to discredit Sinclair combined."

“So that’s your defense? You killed my mate, but I shouldn’t be bothered because it helped me in the polls?”

“No! Of course not!” Lydia pleaded, knowing she was backed into a corner now but helpless to think of a way out. “I didn’t... I didn’t kill her. I would never do such a thing, you have to believe me!”

“You were willing to let your own fated mate die for your ambitions.” Damon reminded her. “You didn’t care about attacking a breeding woman and killing her unborn pup despite your supposed love for children. So why should you give a damn about my mate?”

“Because I respect you too much to ever cross you.” Lydia professed, dropping to her knees. “You’re my Prince, I would never do anything to displease you.”

“And when did that begin? You helped Sinclair oppose me for years with no such loyalty. Let’s be honest, Lydia. Your allegiance goes to the highest bidder, the man who can offer you the most power and status.” The Prince grumbled, unable to unsee her true colors now that they’d been revealed.” You’re a scheming, gold-digging, narcissist, and you saw fit to take my mate – your princess – from me, for your own selfish gain.

Lydia tearfully shook her head, knowing she’d lost. “Please, just let me go, I’ll do anything.”

“It’s too late for that.” Damon snapped, closing the distance between them. “I should

have done this the moment you tried to tell me how to run my own fucking campaign.”

“Please, have mercy.” Lydia begged, sobbing now as she tried to scrabble away from the approaching predator.

“Shut the hell up!” Damon snarled, lashing out with his claws. He wanted to make her suffer – it was, after all, the only thing she-wolves were good for in his mind, but he didn’t have time to waste. He needed to speak with his father and do damage control

before the Alpha Council could think to issue a warrant for his arrest, and torturing the

worthless creature in front of him would only cut into that – no matter how pleasurable

it might be. His claws caught Lydia neck and dug deep, ripping out her throat and

ceasing her pitiful moaning once and for all.

Her lifeless body fell at his feet, and he stepped over her and strode out the door,

wiping her blood on his trousers. “Clean that up.” He ordered the stone faced guard at

the door, before he disappeared down the hall, headed for the King’s study.

#Chapter 149- The Prince’s Gambit

King Andras was watching the press conference when his son stormed in, blood

dripping from his claws. When Damon entered, the conference was winding down,

with Sinclair thanking the press for their support and apologizing again for their

deception. He called for action against the Prince, stating that the fate of the united

packs was at risk if the Alpha Council did not act.

“You idiot.” He growled at his son, clicking off the television. “What the hell were you thinking?”

“I took the wrong advice, but I’ve dealt with that now.” Damon answered snidely, “I got rid of that no-good bitch once and for all.”

“That’s what you get for taking the advice of a woman.” The King groused. “And if that weren’t bad enough, your incompetence has just cost our family the crown!”

“Me!” Damon exclaimed in outrage, “You’re the one who’s being removed from the throne, the only reason I’m in this position in the first place is that you were too weak to fight the council and instead expected me to save your ass and the family legacy! You weren’t even going to let me rule if I won! You expected me to be your fucking puppet!”

“Because you don’t have what it takes to lead!” King Andras shouted. “You do shit like this! Thinking violence can solve all your problems, acting without thinking, taking strategy from a traitorous whore with more cunning than common sense!”

“Oh like you’re so different!” The Prince scoffed cruelly. “You stole the crown exactly the same way I tried to, so if you want to blame anyone for my mistakes, look in the damned mirror!”

He charged towards his heir, rage coloring his face bright red. “I had the wisdom to know when to strike and who to target. I didn’t go after an innocent she-wolf, I went after my enemy himself and I pulled it off because I planned and

accounted for every last contingency. I didn't just take it into my head to kill Henry Sinclair and start lashing out at him any way I could, regardless of the collateral damage! I didn't risk the lives of the citizens I rule or align myself with extremists! I didn't commit treason! I made a single, strategic strike and took out the competition. It's not about morality or nobility, it's about using your bloody head, Damon!"

"Weil if you're so smart, tell me how we're supposed to get out of this without taking extreme action!" Damon shouted, livid that his father wasn't taking his side.

King Andras shook his head in disbelief. "There is no getting out of this, boy. The damage is done and if you think the council will overlook your traitorous plots you are out of your mind. The only option you have now is to run before they can take you into custody."

"Run, go into exile?" Damon spat, "that's your grand plan? Don't you care that Sinclair will become King? That our family will lose everything?"

"Of course I care, you insolent pup." Andras snarled. "But a good Alpha has to know when they're beaten, and trust me when I tell you that we are."

"Not if we gather the royal army." Damon insisted petulantly, stomping his foot. "If we act quickly we could overthrow the Alpha council, Sinclair, all of them. Without their interference and regulations, our power could be limitless. No more quibbling diplomacy, everyone shouting over one another in order to be heard and get their own

way. Total authority.”

‘You mean total tyranny.’ King Andras replied, so shocked by the Prince’s suggestion

that he had to sit down. ‘You’re suggesting we undo years of peace, throw out the

constitution and reform the united packs as an

empire ruled by nothing but your own greed.’ The horror in his eyes was obvious to

his son, and he made no effort to hide it. ‘In all my years I never ... where did I go so

wrong with you?’

‘So you would rather give up, tuck in our tails and accept defeat? That’s pathetic.’

Damon derided. ‘Clearly the council was right to unseat you if this is how you respond

to a challenge. You don’t even have the will to fight, to defend what’s rightfully yours!’

‘Maybe you’re right.’ Andras grimaced, feeling overwhelmed with the depth of his

failure as a father. ‘Because Goddess help me, but right now I can’t help rooting for

Sinclair. If the only alternative to my rule is yours or his, then I would gladly choose

him.’

‘No!’ Damon roared, his adrenaline spiking. ‘You can’t do this! It isn’t fair! I’m your

heir! The throne is supposed to be mine! He can’t have it and I will not run scared!’

‘You don’t have another choice. You made this bed and you are the one who has to lie

in it.’ Andras declared firmly, ‘I won’t protect you from the consequences, Damon. As

far as I’m concerned, you are no longer my son.’

The king sat back in his chair, mind reeling, still at a loss to process the shock of this

conversation. He'd known Damon was not fit to be King for some time now, but he didn't realize the boy was so unhinged. He thought he could control him, teach him, and it had just become painfully obvious that neither would ever be possible.

Still, he didn't expect what was coming next. He never would have imagined his only son might turn his violence onto him, but that's exactly what he did. While the King was still sitting there, a grim expression on his face, Damon pounced. He shifted in a flash, sinking his fangs into his father's exposed throat before the King even knew what was happening.

The king was dead in an instant, and unable to defend himself or conceptualize this new betrayal. When Damon shifted back into human form, spitting out his father's blood and wiping his mouth with the back of his hand, he looked down at the older man with smug triumph. "Now you are no longer my father, what do you think of that, Dad?"

Moving quickly he swept out of the room and found a fresh change of clothes, before going to his beta with the news of the King's demise." Announce to everyone that Sinclair invaded the palace and killed the king, and get rid of the body so they can't analyze the crime scene." He ordered. "Whatever you do, don't make the announcement until the scene has been swept."

'Then mobilize the Royal Army, if they question my authority then tell them that I'm my

father's heir and the United Packs are under attack, that I'm King for all intents and purposes until the Alpha Council can choose another. You can also tell them that the sentence for insubordination will be death... I also need poison" Damon decided, thinking that as cowardly as Lydia's tactics were, there was no doubting they were effective. The average soldier wouldn't be any match for the Alphas on the council, but the overblown leaders wouldn't ever anticipate a poisoning. "We have to get rid of the Alpha Council if we're going to pull this off. Find the most potent poison you can and send a team to the council chambers – they're bound to be meeting in order to determine what to do about Sinclair's accusations. If we act quickly we can take them all out at once. Slip the poison into the coffee service before the servants take it up."

"But if we're poisoning the council, why do we need the army?" His beta interrupted, seeming overwhelmed by everything that was happening, but clearly not feeling brave enough to push back at his Alpha.

"Because the army is for Sinclair." Damon explained through gritted teeth, not having any patience for being questioned.

"I thought... isn't Sinclair on the council?" The beta questioned.

"Yes but he won't be present if they're debating his accusations – he has a conflict of interest. We're going to have to go after him on his own turf, and it's going to take as many soldiers as we can summon." the Prince snapped. "And once he's out of the way it's going to take the full

force of the army to squash any unrest in the united packs.”

“Damon, are you sure about all this?” His beta questioned hesitantly. “You’re talking about a full on coup.”

The Prince rolled his eyes. “I just killed my own father, do you really think I care about the alpha council or a load of peasants?” He demanded severely.

“We’ve got a huge task ahead of us and I need to know that you’re with me, because if you aren’t. I’ll find someone who is.”

“No – no I’m with you.” The beta promised, fear dilating his pupils.

“Good. By this time tomorrow we’ll be the most powerful men on the continent. We’ll

have the entire world at our feet.” He turned to the window, looking out on Moon

Valley with a cold, rapacious gaze. “First the Alpha Council, then Sinclair.”

#Chapter 150-Flight

Ella

“Ella, Ella wake up.” Sinclair’s urgent voice invades my dreams, just as the ground

begins to tremble beneath my feet. As I’m wrenched awake, I realize the ground

wasn’t trembling at all, instead my sleeping body was being shaken by my mate.

Sinclair’s handsome face hovers above my own, his eyes glowing as his hand rests

on my shoulder. “Come on baby, we’ve got to go.”

“I- what? What do you mean?” I mumble groggily.

“We’re under attack, we have to go, sweetheart.” Sinclair explains, pulling me up.

“There’s no time to take anything with us, just get dressed.”

“But I don’t understand, under attack from who?” I ask, feeling as though my mind is dragging. When we went to bed tonight we’d been overjoyed with our victory at the press conference, thinking we were out of the woods at long last. We made love and I passed out to the blissful sound of Sinclair’s contented purrs. What he’s saying simply doesn’t make any sense.

‘The Royal Army, I promise I’ll explain everything later, but right now I need you to just do as I say.’ He strides to the closet in a flash, returning with my warmest sweater and

a pair of fleece lined leggings, as well as my coat and a pair of boots. Clearly sensing

that I’m too shocked and drowsy to keep up with the crisis threatening us, he dresses

me with cool efficiency, only pausing to retrieve a pair of thick wool socks from the dresser before lacing up my boots.

Sinclair returns to the closet to dress himself while I sit on the edge of the bed in a

daze, belatedly realizing he forgot to provide me with underwear. I open my mouth to

tell him as much, but he simply scoops me up in his arms, “We’ll buy you some once

we’re safe, trouble.” He promises, then sweeps me out of the room. Sinclair carries

me down to the mansion’s basement level, surrounded by guards.

Hugo comes running up to us just before we enter an evacuation tunnel I didn’t know

existed. “I got word to Roger and your father. They’ll meet us there.”

‘Where’s there?’ I ask anxiously, my wolf reaching out to Sinclair’s to try to get a

sense of his feelings. Once again I realize he's blocking off his emotions from me, only this time he's not letting the good things shine through. I can't get any sense of his feelings at all, feeling as though I'm reaching into an empty void. "We're leaving the continent." Sinclair informs me tightly. "Leaving the continent?" I repeat, stunned. This is unfathomable to me, I've never been off the continent in my entire life, and the idea that Sinclair would be leaving his pack behind just doesn't compute. If the situation is severe enough to force us out of Moon Valley, why wouldn't we just go to another territory, a neighboring pack? "Things are bad baby." Sinclair murmurs, not slowing his pace as we continue through the tunnel at a jog. The tunnel lets out into a darkened garage, and we pile into a collection of jeeps reinforced to look more like army tanks than standard vehicles. As we speed out of the city, Sinclair is in constant communication with his men, going over our route and making preparations for the journey ahead. It's not until the logistics have all been sorted out that he finally turns to me. He rumbles with concern and drags me into his lap, and I tuck my head against his shoulder. Sinclair takes a deep breath, then tells me. "The Prince has taken over the united packs, Ella. The King is dead, the Alpha council are all dead. It would seem our decision to call him out and the threat of losing his position pushed him over the edge. He's deployed the royal army to lock down Moon Valley, and likely sent assassins to

take out the betas of the other packs so they can't coordinate against him as a shadow council. By this time tomorrow, he will have total control of the pack armies as well as his own."

"Oh my Goddess." Tears burn in my eyes. This was everything we'd been afraid of, only worse. All the shifters and humans left in the Valley would – "Wait!" I exclaim

frantically. "Cora! We have to take her with us!"

"Roger and Dad are picking her up on their way out of the city."

Sinclair informs me

gently, purring to try and ease my distress. "She'll be okay, and she'll be with us soon."

I feel so grateful for my mate in this moment that I could kiss him, but he's holding me

too tightly to move. Instead I kiss his neck and thank him profusely as he cuddles me

like a human security blanket. When I'm done showing my thanks, I'm able to turn my

thoughts to the future. "Dominic, what are we going to do?"

"We're going to go west, to the hidden territories." Sinclair

answers decisively. "I have

some allies there, and the Prince will have his hands so full just trying to suppress the

unrest his coup will cause that he won't be able to spare forces to come after us."

"Where are the hidden territories?" I ask, trying to imagine which points on the human

maps might align with such a name.

"Between here and the Veran continent." Sinclair shares, confusing me to no end.

"But there isn't anything between here and Vera." I remind him, trying to figure out if

he's lost his mind or perhaps I've lost mine. "Only the ocean."

‘That’s why they’re hidden, trouble.’ Sinclair explains, pressing a few kisses to my forehead. “The lands were previously uninhabited, and were settled by wolves who were tired of having to keep their true natures secret – they wanted to live away from humans, so they formed a federation of shifter- only societies. Shifters have always had more advanced technologies, so this all happened before the human populations began exploring the world, and when they started, the wolves in the hidden territories made sure the continent couldn’t be found.”

“But now we have satellites and cross the oceans in airplanes and everything.” I say, not entirely understanding how this could be possible. Then again, I went my whole life living with shifters right under my nose and never knew they existed, so I suppose it shouldn’t seem quite so outlandish.

“Yes, but we have shielding technology that makes it impossible to detect the territories from all sides. The shields project whatever images one would expect to see from their particular perspective, so from above it simply looks like more water.”

Sinclair explains, rubbing my belly and making Rafe kick up a storm.

“Okay.” I can accept this explanation, since I’ve seen first hand how far ahead shifters are when it comes to technology, but this doesn’t account for everything. “And what about boats? If they’re sailing along and the captain only sees open ocean ahead, why don’t humans sail into them?”

“Because it doesn’t just look like open ocean, the shields project the image of a massive storm so that sailors won’t enter the territory’s waters, they’ll sail around the storm and if they get too close their equipment starts going haywire.” Sinclair tells me, seeming more and more relaxed the farther we get from Moon Valley. Instead of simply clutching me against his chest his hands are gradually beginning to explore my body, though I suppose this could be another comfort mechanism – ensuring that I’m whole and unharmed. ‘That’s where all the human legends about the Dark Triangle come from.’ 1

My jaw drops with amazement, every child in the world has heard tales of that mysterious point in the ocean where magic seems to routinely disappear ships and aircraft. “You mean we’re going there? To the Dark Triangle?” I exclaim with excitement, momentarily forgetting my distress due to the sheer astonishment of hearing I’m going to a mythical land.

Sinclair’s lip quirks, “If I’d known that’s all I needed to say to ease your mind I would have started with it. Yes, sweet mate, we’re going to the Dark Triangle.” He confirms, “though the people there might be offended if you call it that. In truth we’ll land in a territory called Vanara. It will be very different from home, but it will be safe.”

“I... are we-” I’m not sure how to ask my next question, and in the end I just blurt it out.

“Is this forever?”

“No.” Sinclair replies firmly. “Once we arrive I’m going to rally the Alphas of the federation to move against the Prince. I’ll take whatever support they’re willing to give, and I’ll use my spies back home to form a citizen army... a rebellion. When the time is right we’ll return.” He pauses and looks down at me with regret. “At least I will.”

“You mean... alone?” I inquire, aghast.

“Yes.” He sighs, and he opens a floodgate of emotion to me, revealing how much he hates this thought. “Because when I go back, I’ll be going to war.”

#Chapter 151 – Exile

Ella

The journey to the hidden territories was swift once we reached the coast.

We boarded a small plane and ascended into the heavens at top speed, and I swear

Sinclair didn’t relax until we were cruising at 30,000 feet. I didn’t realize how tense

he’d been even after we left Moon Valley, until we were out of danger and his muscles finally unwound.

The flight took more than six hours, though I slept most of the way. When we finally

landed Sinclair gently untangled our bodies, which instantly woke me. I emit a sleepy

moan, looking up at him blearily. “Are we there?”

“Yes,” He confirms, leaning over to cup my cheek. “But stay here until I can make sure it’s safe, okay?”

Without another word, he disappears out the door with his men, descending the small

staircase leading down to the tarmac. I lurch to my feet, moving to

the windows to look
outside. My first glimpse of the hidden territories takes my breath
away; the horizon is
dominated by a glittering lake, framed beneath the towering peaks
of snow-capped
mountains. At the center of the lake, looking as though it's floating
on the water, is an
opulent city which is only visible at certain angles. The rest of the
time it looks like
nothing more than a ball of light.

Eager to get out and explore, I quickly spy my mate, prowling
around the area with

Hugo and our guards to make sure no danger is hiding just out of
sight. In the
distance I can also see a line of shiny cars waiting for us, and I
roll my eyes.

Overprotective wolves.

I emerge from the plane and breathe in the foreign air, my newly
awakened senses
assailed by strange and unfamiliar scents. I cradle my belly in my
arms, feeling a
wave of curiosity from my pup. Rafe may not know what's going
on, but he knows I'm
feeling alight with interest. "Are you ready, my darling?" I ask him,
"We're going on an
adventure." He flutters in my womb, and I feel thoroughly
encouraged.

I don't even get to the end of the platform before Sinclair turns
and sees me. A wave
of disapproval assails me, and then his voice sounds in my head.
I told you to stay
put.

What, so you can protect me from all this fresh air and the
beautiful landscapes? I

sass in reply, taking the first step down the stairway. Sinclair

bounds to my side in an instant, scooping me up and growling deep in his chest. “Naughty mate, you have no idea what dangers could be awaiting us.”

“Oh, like the bath snakes you once warned me about?” I ask archly, finding it impossible not to smile at the memory.

‘That was a joke. This isn’t.’ Sinclair grimaces. ‘We’re in unknown territory now – quite literally. Don’t ask me to take your safety for granted because I won’t do it, Ella.’

‘We have to feel safe somewhere, Dominic.’ I reply gently, stroking his jaw.

“Otherwise we’ll drive ourselves crazy with worry.”

‘The only place I ever feel you’re safe is when you’re in my arms.’ Sinclair shares, and suddenly I understand why he’s always touching me. It’s not only for affection, but his own comfort as well.

‘Then what on earth were you doing leaving me alone in a plane?’ I tease, nuzzling my face against his neck.

My mate shakes his head with an indulgent purr, “how we ever thought you were human, I’ll never know.” Sinclair remarks dryly. “Only she-wolves can manage to be so insolent and so sweet at once.”

I giggle as he carries me down the steps, belatedly realizing that we probably left the secrets of my past behind and out of reach. Of course, thoughts of my past only make me think of my sister, “When will Cora arrive?” 1

“Soon.” Sinclair promises, kissing my brow. ‘They were coming from the shadow pack.’ I don’t need more explanation. When we fled we took

different paths for the sake of safety, and Roger, Henry and Cora had gone east while we'd gone west. It makes sense that the others had a longer journey. As Sinclair carries me towards the line of cars, the back door to the middle vehicle opens, and then a distinguished looking man emerges. He's probably five or six years older than Sinclair, and thus a decade older than me, but he welcomes us with a wide smile and open arms. "Dorn!" "Gabriel!" Sinclair replies, flashing his fangs but showing no aggression. He puts me down only long enough to embrace the other man, then promptly tucks me under his arm. "This is my mate, Ella. Ella, this is King Gabriel Montclair of Vanara."

My eyes widen when I hear this man is royalty, but then again my mate was almost a king as well. I extend my hand to him, "Pleasure to meet you." Gabriel clasps both of his hands around mine. "It's an honor." He replies warmly, a somber note entering his expression as he looks back and forth between us. "I'm so sorry for all you've been through."

"Why? You didn't do it." I quip, before I can think better of it. Gabriel's tender expression cracks, and then he's throwing his head back with laughter. "Well I see why you picked her, Dorn." He expresses to Sinclair, even though the mood has been permanently dampened. "But I do feel for you. It's all over the news and I can't believe it. How one man could take out the entire Alpha council, all the betas. It's unthinkable."

“Well he didn’t do it on his own, or honorably,” Sinclair grumbles. By now I’ve been caught up on all the developments regarding the Prince’s coup, and I know these wolves consider the use of poison a cowardly, disgraceful tactic. “Still, it is hard to fathom.” He agrees, squeezing me a bit more tightly. “But we’re here now, and we can only move forward.”

“Damn right.” Gabriel confirms, gripping my mate’s shoulder.

“Come on, we’ve got a welcome party awaiting you.”

I dig in my heels. “But what about Cora and Henry?” I ask anxiously. “What about Roger?”

“A couple of the cars will stay behind to collect your family once they arrive.” The King announces, surprising me. He certainly seems very clued in to our affairs. Though I suppose this should be the case, since he’s made all the arrangements.

I’m still not convinced, and though Sinclair could easily sweep me along against my will, he turns to me and rests a hand on my tummy. “We need to get settled and find you a doctor. As soon as the others arrive we’ll meet them.”

“Why a doctor?” I demand indignantly, feeling defiant for reasons I don’t understand.

Of course, Sinclair doesn’t seem to have any issues understanding. He simply purrs and shifts nearer. “You haven’t been examined since your wolf woke, and we’ve been through a lot. You need a check up.”

“But Rafe is fine.” I insist, notching my chin up.

“He might be, but I want to know about you.” Sinclair murmurs in

a firm tone. “Don’t
you want to find out if you can come off bed rest?”

#Chapter 152 – Check Up

I never imagined being in exile would look like this.
King Gabriel’s palace is the most extravagant display of luxury
I’ve ever seen, and it’s

not as if I’m a stranger to mansions and palaces. That thought
alone is enough to

send me reeling... who would have ever dreamed that poor
orphan Ella would end up

rubbing elbows with the most important figures in the land, or
have the social capital

to become a political threat?

As we exit the cars and enter the building, I can only stare around
myself in awe. The

wealth here makes the wealth back on my home continent look
like nothing, and the

air seems to vibrate with the energy of the strange crystals which
form the city. We get

a brief tour of the palace, and then we’re escorted up to a
sprawling suite of rooms,

even more expansive than the master suite in Sinclair’s manor.

However the size of the space isn’t what leaves me dumbstruck,
it’s the feeling that

we’re suddenly deep in the alpine forests of my home. The walls
are all comprised of

giant screens, each one displaying a live feed of some dense
woodland – or so it

seems. Even the ceiling displays a realistic view of the sky, a light
dappled canopy

which projects actual rays of sunlight down to the floor. Tucked in
the farthest corner

of the room is a large, round bed with sheer curtains around the
edges. Blankets and

pillows are waiting to be piled into a nest, and I feel as though I'm in one of my shared dreams with Sinclair.

His arms slide around my waist, and his lips graze my ear. "Do you like it?" All of a sudden I realize that he instructed the King to have our rooms prepared this way, to give me a safe space while we're in exile.

I can't help myself. I turn and climb into his arms, not satisfied with a simple hug and instead scrabbling up his huge body as if it were a tree. I wrap my arms and legs around my mate, rewarded with a low purr. "We're going to find a way back home, Ella. I promise."

"I know." I tell him honestly. "I trust you."

I realize that Gabriel has stepped outside, leaving us alone. I tilt my face up to Sinclair's, finding his gaze already on me. It's so intense, so heated, and I couldn't escape it even if I wanted to. He claims my lips in a deep kiss, and only the sound of a knock on the door tears us apart.

The doctor who enters is warm and gentle as he greets us, showing no small amount of sympathy for our plight. Still it takes quite a bit of cajoling to make me leave my mate's arms, and only concern for my baby convinces me to leave him. The physician takes my blood pressure and vitals, and sits patiently as we explain the story of my suppressed wolf and traumatic shift. Sinclair stays by my side throughout the examination, and when they wheel in an ultrasound machine and Rafe's tiny, three

dimensional image appears on the screen, I begin to cry for no other reason than how much I love him.

The physician then draws my blood, to the soundtrack of Sinclair's grumpy growls, and there's only one final set of tests to run when a guard sticks his head into the room. "Alpha, they've arrived."

Sinclair nods in acknowledgement, but I perk up with excitement.

"Who's arrived?" I

inquire eagerly. "Cora and Henry and Roger?"

'They'll still be here after your check up, trouble.'" Sinclair declares, massaging my nape.

"But I want to go see them." I insist, trying to squirm free of Sinclair's firm hold and the doctor's gloved fingers. "I have to make sure they're okay." Ever since my wolf woke up I've been feeling even more protective of my family than usual.

Cora might trigger

the strongest response, but my inner canine has also claimed Henry and Roger as part of her pack and there won't be any dissuading her.

Sinclair emits a warning growl, sending a shiver down my spine.

His strong hands

hold me in place, and I shoot him a sullen look as the doctor continues poking and

prodding me. When I settle out of nothing more than sulky acknowledgement that I

can't out-muscle these men, Sinclair leans down to kiss my cheek. I jerk away from

him, baring my fangs with an insolent snarl, and Sinclair only arches a foreboding

brow before claiming my mouth instead.

In my head I feel a wave of dominance, followed by the dark

rumble of his wolf,
behave, sweet mate.
Bite me. My own wolf replies, speaking before I have a chance to
consider the
wisdom of these words.
Gladly. Sinclair replies, nipping his claiming mark where my neck
meets my shoulders.
My wolf immediately lights up from the inside out, and the doctor
gives us a quelling
look. "I can't very well perform a cardiac stress test when you're
making her heart race
like that, Alpha."
"Don't look at me." Sinclair remarks, his eyes glowing. "She's the
one challenging her
mate." My little imp. He adds silently, for my benefit alone.
Rolling his eyes, the doctor finishes his tests, gradually rising to
his feet as he puts up
his equipment. "Well, I think you're safe to return to most of your
normal activities,
Ella." He instructs, holding up a staying hand when I immediately
jump up with
excitement. "I don't want you doing anything strenuous, especially
not when you've
been through so much, but I think waking your wolf has helped
your condition. All that
said, the first moment you start to feel faint, palpitations, spots in
your vision or any of
the other symptoms you experienced when your original doctor
gave this order, you
need to contact me immediately."
"Is there anything I can do to support her?" Sinclair asks, and I
feel a silent wave of
anxiety from his wolf.
"Just continue giving her wolf what she needs. Protect her, care
for her, but don't spoil

her if she's challenging you – the challenge is a sign she needs you to make her feel

as if you have everything under control.” He advises.

“Thank you.” Sinclair professes, shaking his hand and escorting him out of the room.

I'm already out of bed and readjusting my clothes when he turns back, and I quickly

bound over the floor. “Let's go!” I demand.

Sinclair chuckles and hooks an arm around my body, slowing me down even when I

grumble at the pace. Still, mere minutes later we're in the entrance hall and my

beautiful sister is running into my open arms, followed shortly by Roger and Henry.

“Cora!” I exclaim, squeezing her tight. “How are you, are you okay?”

Cora is crying into my neck, her shoulders shaking beneath my hands. “I'm so glad

you're here.” She sniffles, letting me rock her back and forth. “This is all so crazy – one

moment everything was fine and then... and then...why is this happening?”

“I know.” I croon, turning worried eyes to my mate. He's greeting his family with hugs

and hushed words, grim expressions on their faces. But Cora is still weeping and

hiccuping, waiting for me to answer her. “I'm sorry, I never wanted you to get mixed up

in all of this.”

“How long are we going to have to stay here?” She asks, reminding me so much of

the little girl who used to crawl into my bed when she had a nightmare that my heart

positively aches.

“I don't know.” I confess, kissing her hair. “But it will be okay. I'm

just so glad you're here and your safe. Was it hard getting out of the city." Cora shakes her head, pulling away from me at last and wiping her eyes." Roger came for me before the news even broke, but we weren't sure if you got out until Dominic sent word. I was so afraid that you weren't going to escape."

"I'm safe." I assure her, framing her face in my hands. "We're both safe. That's all that matters."

Even as I say the words I look back to Sinclair, who is once again shielding his feelings from me. Despite what I tell my sister, I know I'm lying. Our safety isn't all that matters – because the millions of people we left behind are probably suffering untold terrors at this very moment. I can only imagine how heavy the burden Sinclair feels for being here when his pack remains under the Prince's thumb. At the same time, I feel how necessary our escape was. Sinclair can't help anyone if he's dead, and nor can I.

When he looks over at me, I can sense the anger, worry and fear rolling off of his body, even as he tries to shield me from it. I realize that while Sinclair might have been the one asking how to support me as a mother mere minutes ago, I have to do the same for him. My job is to support my mate in the darkest day of his career as Alpha, and though he might not want me to do so, I decide right then and there that I'm not going to give him a choice, i

