

# Accidental Surrogate for Alpha

Chapter 190

Ella

I turn on my heel and run away as fast as my feet will carry me.

My would-be kidnappers curse and soon their footsteps are pounding into the pavement behind me. I fly through the sleeping city, careful to make sure I travel in the opposite direction Cora ran. I hadn't been sure they'd both follow me when another target was still within reach, but it seems their outrage over being duped by a little girl was strong enough to make them focus on me.

I know I need to find some place to hide, or some way to lose them. I'm small and fast, but my pursuers have longer legs and are probably in much better shape than I am. I can't remember the last time I ate, let alone the last time I exercised for any reason other than survival. I turn towards the park in the center of the valley – the trees are dense and there's little to no light, plus I've always had a talent for seeing in the darkness... at least I used to.

My adrenaline pushes me to sprint away from the men, even though my head is telling me to pace myself. I don't risk looking over my shoulder, I simply run until my lungs are burning and my sides are splitting with cramps. Still, I don't let myself slow down. I push through the pain and exhaustion, forcing myself to take longer strides, to move faster still.

I feel a slight flash of relief, when I reach the forest, bounding into the cover of the trees and veering away from the path. I leap over fallen logs and plow through the thick undergrowth, wondering if I should keep running or attempt to climb a tree.

An angry shout sounds behind me, and I realize my pursuers are closer than I knew. My heart stutters with raw panic, but I keep going, panting with the effort of drawing air.

Blood rushes in my ears, and though I can feel branches and thorns scraping my legs, I don't feel any pain. My frantic brain hallucinates the sound of a wolf howling in the distance, then two more join the cry and my eyes flit around the woods, searching for unseen predators. We're deep in the forest now, and all at once I realize this was the worst possible place I could have chosen to flee.

I've always felt safe in the forest, but it seems my eyesight is not as sharp as I remember amidst this pitch blackness, and I've led my attackers away from the bustling city – from any witnesses or bystanders that might step in to help me.

I'm slowing down, no matter how hard I try to carry on. I was running on fumes to begin with, and my adrenaline can only do so much. No! I think frantically, keep going! If they catch you it's all over. They'll sell you to a brothel or to some monster like the Doctor. No one will be left to protect Cora. You have to fight!

A final burst of energy gives me a fleeting sense of hope. I pick up speed once more, but in doing so I move too fast to adequately take in my surroundings. My foot catches on a protruding rock, and I tumble to the ground, rolling and crashing through the undergrowth. I finally come to a stop, sprawled on my back and gasping for air.

I'm bruised and bleeding, and I feel as if I've been punched in the stomach, my lungs temporarily frozen in shock.

My attackers loom above me then, panting for breath but looking down at me with sickening smiles. "Now look at what you've done, you stupid girl." The first remarks, "How are we supposed to get a good price for you when you're all marked up this way? Hmm?"

His partner smirks, "At this rate it will be a week before we can take her to auction, so there's really no reason to be delicate with her. We might as well test the merchandise."

"I agree." The first leers, "The little bitch was asking for it, besides I doubt a pretty thing like this is still pure anyway. You remember how she offered herself up for her friend. The little hussy is just gagging for it."

"Then let's not disappoint her." The second declares, reaching for his belt. "Don't worry slut, we'll make this good for you – as long as you don't fight."

Tears burn in my eyes. I know what happens next

..I know I can survive it, but I don't want to. I don't want to be hurt that way again, and their cruel words fill me with a well of humiliation deeper than I can fathom. It's not my fault I'm not pure, it's not my fault I look this way.. it isn't fair. What have I done to deserve this? Haven't I suffered enough in my short life?

I choke back a sob, I don't know what to do. If I fight them they'll hurt me worse, and if I don't they'll insist that I like it. I look around the forest, searching for some escape, some last ditch rescue.

I freeze when I see two robed figures a dozen meters away, illuminated in a shaft of moonlight between the trees. I don't recognize the men, and yet they seem strangely familiar. They stand there motionless, their hands clasped as they watch the scene with my kidnappers unfold. Their wrinkled faces are drawn in frowns, but they don't make a sound. They don't move to help me, or acknowledge my terror... they simply watch.

"What is she looking at?" The first man grumbles, sounding annoyed that my full attention isn't on them.

"I don't know, there's nothing there." The second mutters in frustration. I can't focus enough to comprehend that they can't see the strange men, I'm still staring at the pair with desperation, silently begging them to help me but still too afraid to scream. I know they see me. They're looking right at me – so why aren't they acting?

Surely they don't think I'm here willingly. I hear a whoosh of air, and then a sickening crack as pain explodes across my cheekbone. I hear myself cry out, even though I hate giving them the satisfaction. My vision goes black for a moment, then fills with stars as I blink up at the men in confusion. Any hope I'd kept alive dies as I accept the fact that no rescue is in store for me. They're going to rape me, and then they're going to sell me to be abused over and over again.. possibly for the rest of my life.

The gravity, the reality of that future slams into me, and suddenly my stomach is rising into my throat. I vomit onto the ground beside me, and the men leap back in disgust. "You idiot, you hit her too hard"

"Just drag her over here, I don't want to get it on me." The other orders.

Someone lifts my feet, and then I'm being wrenched across the cold, hard earth like a ragdoll.

I blink up at the sky, wishing to leave my body, to be knocked unconscious so that if I must be violated, I won't have to remember it. Then something glints in my periphery, like silver and starlight. It's just a flash, buried among the leaf litter and course woody debris of the forest floor.

My focus locks onto it, and the closer I look, I recognize the hilt of a dagger. The weapon is unlike anything I've ever seen – not the simple blades included in multipurpose tools or even the jagged knives used by hunters. This looks like something out of a museum. Jewels are imbedded in the hilt, and though I can't see the blade, I instinctively sense that it's sharp enough to slice through steel.

I reach for it, trying not to telegraph my movements as the first man wrenches my legs apart and rips at my clothes. My fingers close around the cold metal, and I act before I can even think. My body is in survival mode – I've tried flight, and now all that's left is fight. After all, it's not like I have anything to lose. I slash the dagger across the first man's throat, watching his flesh rip open with detached horror. It took more strength than I expected, but I managed, and now his hot, crimson blood is gushing out as he gurgles and claws at his neck.

The second man jerks around in shock, wide eyed.

"What – Steven!" He leans down to try to apply pressure to his friend's wound, clearly more concerned with saving the man than identifying the threat which caused this damage. "What... how

As soon as his eyes slide to me I strike again, burying the blade in the side of his neck until the tip protrudes from the other side of his throat. I rip it free and stab again, before scrambling back on my hands and feet. The second man collapses atop the first, though he still reaches for me, "you little bitch."

"Are those really the words you want for your last?"

I manage to spit, drawing strength from some unknown source. He opens his mouth again, but nothing comes out. I watch as the light drains from their eyes, before finally looking back to the robed men. They nod their approval, and the first sets a bundle of cloth on a log by his feet. They turn on their heels and stride back through the trees, disappearing from sight.

My limbs are trembling violently, and when I look back to the dead men, I discover that the knife has disappeared. I'm alone in the forest with two dead bodies, covered in blood and my own vomit. But I'm alive, and other than some bruises, I'm unharmed.

I shakily rise to my feet, though it takes a few tries.

I move forward in a trance, investigating the bundle the robed man left behind. It's a fresh change of clothes and a bottle of water. Moving on autopilot I wash away as much of the gore as I can and change, knowing that if I return home to Cora this way, she'll be traumatized. After, I walk out of the forest as if nothing happened, and the strangest part of all is that the closer I come to the edge, the less I remember.

By the time I emerge I can't recall anything at all, and when my sister asks I can only answer that I lost our attackers... and as far as I know, it's the truth.