

## Accidental Surrogate for Alpha

Chapter 184

3rd Person

Cora's first week working with the doctors at the airfield was both overwhelming and fascinating. She felt like she was lightyears behind the Vanaran physicians in medical expertise and technological know-how, but they were welcoming and patient with her deficiencies. She threw herself into the work, accepting the fact that she'd have to start as a glorified scrub nurse until she learned enough to start doing major procedures and seeing patients on her own.

Cora felt as she had in the early days of medical school, as if her brain was a sodden sponge already oversaturated with new information but still trying to soak up more. The work was fascinating, but it was also devastating and draining. This wasn't like being in school and practicing on her fellow students or cadavers – her patients were real people and they were suffering so much more than injury or disease. They were grappling with grief and loss – for the lives and homeland they cherished if nothing else.

By the end of her fourth day on the job, Cora was ready to collapse. She looked around at the other doctors and wondered how on earth they found the strength to keep up this work. She was tempted to ask, but instead she gritted her teeth and pushed through the last hour of her shift. About half an hour before they were set to finish for the day, Cora found herself with a rare moment of quiet. There was only one patient left, and the head surgeon already had too many helping hands for her to pitch in.

Cora began to clean her work station, disinfecting! everything she'd touched and wiping down every surface in sight, before neatly stowing her supplies. She was intently scrubbing her hands when a familiar voice sounded over her shoulder. "Do you have time for one last patient?"

She looked up to find her new colleague, May, standing behind her with a kind expression. Cora looked around, both searching for the patient in question and a substitute for the sick bay she'd just packed up. Her eyes landed on the other woman's, which seemed viable. "Can I use your workstation?"

"Sure." May agreed, "it's sanitized but haven't put everything up yet."

"Who's the patient?" Cora asked, pulling on a fresh pair of gloves.

"He requested you by name," May shrugged. "I think he's part of your own delegation."

Cora's traitorous heart skipped a beat, and a moment later Roger appeared, cradling his left hand. Cora narrowed her eyes, determined not to let the butterflies causing chaos in her tummy sway her judgment. He stood in the doorway, all masculine charm and Alpha dominance – and as usual, his full attention was glued to her blushing face.

"You know there's an in-house physician at the Palace." She stated coolly. "I'm sure his team can handle whatever ailment plaguing you."

"But the palace is so far away, and you don't have any other patients, right?" Roger inquired, a devious glint in his eyes.

Just because I don't now, doesn't mean an emergency might not come in at any moment."

Cora countered, her hands on her hips. "And if my hands are tied with you, then who will help them?"

still unphased, the clever wolf pursed his lips. "One of the other physicians packing away their stations?" He suggests, nodding to the Vanaran doctors around them.

Cora huffed, "what's wrong with you anyway?"

Roger presented his hand, which had a large but certainly non-urgent splinter of wood embedded in his palm. "I think I'm dying."

Cora glowered, the leash on her temper snapping taught. It took a lot of built up frustration for her to let loose at someone, but she'd been tormented by this wolf for more than a week now. True, he hadn't made a move since that confusing night at dinner, but his presence was impossible to escape. She could always feel when he was near, and half the time she wasn't quick enough to flee before he entered a room and found her with those dark eyes.

She was constantly trying not to squim under his searing gaze, forever trying to block out his husky voice so it wouldn't make her pulse race. Things had gotten to the point that Cora was practically looking around corners to make sure he wasn't lying in wait to surprise and tempt her with his rugged features and mysterious allure.

Thus, when faced with this latest outrage, Cora threw her well-honed skills for self-preservation out the window. "Are you fucking kidding me, Roger? You do realize that people are actually dying here, don't you?" She didn't wait for him to answer furiously ripping off her gloves. "This isn't cute, you know. Do you have any idea what my day has been like?"

His roguish expression softened, and he replied, "From the looks of it, it's been the sort that means you're in dire need of a laugh." Roger assessed, mouth quirking. "And a stiff drink – perhaps with a friend who's good at listening."

"And that's supposed to be you?" She snorted derisively. "If that's your example of your humor, then I'm not interested in hearing more, and I don't drink."

I've seen you drink more than once, Cora. Roger corrected her, a note of warning entering his voice.

I should have said that I don't drink with you."

She amended in a biting tone.

"oh?" He answered with a smirk. "Why not?"

You're not scared are you?

Cora scowled, notching her chin up. "I can't be baited that easily either, but I assure you fear isn't the problem."

(Then what is?" Roger pressed, moving forward so that he loomed over the curvy human. "You've said you have no interest in me, so what's the problem?"

You get to relax and vent a little and enjoy a night off from all this stress – is that so terrible.

(I don't want to humanize you." She countered fiercely. "If I do, I might forget what a jerk you are."

Roger chuckled, sidling closer. "Should I take that to mean I'm growing on you?" He questioned slyly.

I knew the ice cream would work."

«The ice cream was a dirty trick and you know it."

Cora insisted stubbornly, trying not to let him see how much she'd enjoyed it. In truth it had been the best ice cream she'd ever tasted, and though she'd only meant to take a single bite before smashing it in the wolf's smug face, she'd ended up devouring it all in a single sitting. "You need to learn how to take no for an answer."

Roger emitted a wordless rumble. "Now I have to think that a brilliant doctor who spent as many years working among wolves as you did, must know better than to challenge an Alpha."

"You see, this is the problem with you wolves."

Cora seethed. "A no isn't a challenge, it's not a provocation, it's simply an answer to a basic question."

Roger purred, but it was not a gentle sound, it was more like a murmur somewhere between a hum and a growl. His eyes began to glow amber as he looked down at Cora. "And the problem with you humans, is that you fail to realize how much you say with body language and pheromones. I take your no as a challenge because it's meant as one, and I pursue you despite your protests because I can smell your attraction to me."

(I've been attracted to plenty of people I had no intention of taking to bed. Attraction is a reflex, not proof or justification of actual interest." Cora hissed defensively. "I don't do this. I don't get involved with men who want more from me than I can give – it's a recipe for disaster."

"And what do you give?" Roger questioned, settling his hands on her hips and scalding her through her clothes. "Some hurried one night stand with a stranger you meet in a bar and won't ever see again?"

Cora's chocolate eyes went wide. "How did you know that?"

"An educated guess." Roger flashed his fangs.

Which you just confirmed." His powerful fingers ran up her side, and he relished the sound of her heart pounding against her ribcage at a mile a minute.

But for the record, I knew because I've been the same way ever since Lydia left me. It's not a pattern you begin because it's what you truly want – you do it because it's safer than risking your heart." He searched her lovely face, "Of course, we know why I chose that path – why did you, Cora?"

"Stop it." Cora ordered sharply. "Stop talking to me this way, stop touching me." Her lower lip quivered dangerously, and Roger sighed, accepting that he wasn't going to get any further with the human on this day.

He released her slowly, "I'll be here when you're ready to talk, whether it's about your work here, or us." He offered. "Anything you have to say, I always want to listen." He reached over to her medical tools and plucked a pair of tweezers from the tray, quickly extracting the splinter from his hand and retreating.

Cora was left staring after him in surprise and confusion, feeling – for the first time – as if she was way out of her depth with this wolf.

She didn't like it- not one bit.