

Chapter 348

Mac turned his black gaze on the man sitting beside him pinning him with a cold stare. His entire body was rigid with tension, his muscles taut with the strain of remaining still. Kallum's words rang around the silent room, his expression fixed and determined. It was all Mac could do not to explode as he glared at the other man.

"Let's get one thing straight between us, Kallum," he said in a voice so cold it could freeze water. "I decide who becomes a Praetorian. I select them; have my people train them, and only the best come anywhere near our compound. When I'm confident the candidates are worthy, I call the Triumvirate for the final confirmation of their loyalty. There's only one person who leads the Praetorians and that's me."

The quiet coldness suddenly vanished and red hot fury filled the room. "So don't you fucking dare tell me what's going to happen in my own backyard. I don't give a fuck who you think you are. No one tells me how to run the Praetorians. I've been doing it for twenty-five years and the only people who can tell me what to do is the Triumvirate. Until they decide I'm no longer needed, the Vârcolac are mine to protect and I decide whether or not they're allowed anywhere near the Praetorian compound."

Caleb tensed immediately, his head turning to Rhianna as she placed a hand soothingly on his chest and gave a minute shake of her head. She was clearly indicating that he keep out of the discussion between Mac and Kallum. It was hard to do so when his protective instincts were kicking into gear, but she had to have a reason for holding him back. He turned his gaze back to the two men.

Kallum was watching Mac with a guarded expression on his face. He didn't appear tense but there was a slight tightening of his lips which was one of the few signs he gave when he was displeased about something. He wasn't backing down from Mac, but he wasn't deliberately inflaming the situation either.

He'd known his announcement wasn't going to be popular. He hadn't intended on forcing their way into the Praetorians, but it was clear they all needed to be there. He had to find a balance which Mac found acceptable and would allow the others to get the training they needed. In the event of an attack, they had to be able to defend themselves. And he also had no intention of leaving Lily alone while Mac was out of the country.

He considered his options carefully. He could probably take the head Praetorian in a fight. He could sense the age of the vampire and knew it would probably be a hard fight but he was confident he could win it. But that would piss Lily off if he started beating up her mate and a pissed off Lily was not an easy thing to live with.*w w w . n o v e l w o r m . c o m*

He didn't particularly want to fight Mac anyway. In just the short time he'd been in the other man's presence, he'd found himself coming to respect him quite quickly. There was no doubt in his mind that Mac would be the perfect mate for his sister. He was strong enough to cope with her wildness and yet he instinctively knew that he wouldn't cage her spirit either.

The fact that he'd been angry that Kallum was threatening to kick Lily's ass was a clear indicator that he was well on the way to mating with her. He might not be too happy about the prospect but Lily was never one to be thwarted when she really wanted something. And she wanted Mac.

Taking a deep breath, Kallum let it out slowly while he dialled down his Alpha tendencies and thought of what was best for his people. He gave Mac a wide grin feeling a bit of the tension leave the room. "Damn," he laughed softly. "You're so much like Dad it's spooky."

He watched annoyance flare across the other man's face and he knew he didn't want to discuss Lily's declaration of mating with him. It made his smile widen and he had to fight the urge to really annoy Mac. There was times when even Kallum was just a little too much like his father and this was one of them.

"You say the Vârcolac are yours to protect, Mac," he continued, his expression turning serious. "So protect us. I've already listed the reasons why we need the Praetorians, some of us more than others. It makes sense that now that everything is out in the open, that you use everything that's available to you to ensure we're able to protect ourselves. You know what I'm saying makes sense. If you didn't, then Lily wouldn't still be at your compound."

Mac couldn't argue with him. He had no doubts that he was hard enough to send Lily packing if he really thought her presence would damage the Praetorians beyond repair. The fact that he hadn't, meant he was well aware of just how much she needed to learn control. If the others needed that training too...?

He turned to the Ancients to try and judge their thoughts on it. Caleb appeared thoughtful and Rhianna was smiling at Kallum with fondness on her face. She appeared impressed with his stance, almost like a proud parent. Caleb rolled his eyes and shrugged his big shoulders.

"The Praetorians are yours to run how you deem fit, Mac," he said quietly. "We have every confidence in you. You've never let us down."

"You'd better do as Karn tells you," Mac rumbled irritably turning back to Kallum. "There's only one person in charge while I'm away and he's it. If Karn feels we need to bring any of the others to the compound then it's his decision. If you try any of your Alpha shit, then you and your sister will be sent back to the pack. Am I making myself perfectly clear?"*w w w . n O v e l W o r m . © © M*

"I know how to follow the chain of command, Mac," Kallum smiled, satisfaction spreading across his face. "There can only be one Alpha in any pack. I would never dream of challenging Rafe or his Betas and I wouldn't do so in the Praetorians either."

He leaned forward, his gaze intense. "We need you," he said quietly. "Lily needs you. I'll do just about anything to ensure my sister's happiness, Mac. If you want to kick my ass a hundred times over to prove you're the Alpha and that's what it takes to ensure she's happy, then you can start kicking."

The sincerity in his voice and his expression was undeniable. His quiet words were loaded with hidden meaning and Mac heard what he was saying. Kallum believed that he was Lily's mate. His closeness with his sister meant that he accepted her choice and he'd move heaven and earth to ensure that she was happy; even if it meant having to accede to the man she'd chosen.

Kallum's relationship with Lily was the deciding factor for Mac. The younger man had impressed him already with his keen intelligence and his fierce loyalty towards his pack and fellow Vârcolac. But it was his deep abiding love for Lily that really penetrated Mac's objections to having him at the compound.

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He knew his people would die to protect her in an instant. But he knew that Kallum was probably one of the best people who could truly protect her. Lily had been lethal when sparring with him. If she'd been holding back...if Kallum was as strong as and possibly stronger than she was no one would be able to hurt her as long as he was around.

"Just so we're perfectly clear about things," he finally said, allowing acceptance to creep into his voice. "I'll call Karn and let him know you're coming."

"What about the pack?" he asked as he stood up, pulling his cell phone from his pocket.

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"We'll talk to Rafe about it," Caleb answered. "He'll keep the Romanovs away from the compound and make sure they behave themselves. Andrei could be a problem but hopefully when he finds out Lily is surrounded by the Praetorians it'll calm him down enough. We won't let him disrupt the compound while you're away."