

Chapter 533

The air was subdued as they arrived back at the Armand-Hanlon Pack. Rafe drove into the main compound first, his mate, Lacey, at his side, with Liam and Reasa in the back seat. As the trees parted to open up into a wide, circular enclosure, the Alpha had a split second to decide where he was going to stop.

His large three-storey house was set a bit higher and off to the right of the compound, but he continued forward until he stopped at the two-storey dwelling that belonged to Nors and Ashleigh. It was Liam's home and from the way the redheaded Vârcolac was holding onto the woman in his arms, it was clear that he wasn't going to be willing to part from her. The man in Rafe could understand that because he would never allow anyone to come between him and his mate. For the Alpha -- he didn't need the additional headache.

Rafe was concerned on so many different levels. He was bringing a woman into his pack who had come here with the intent to murder the Vârcolac. His wolf wanted her gone and the pack protected at all costs. Convincing him that she was no longer a physical threat was easy, it was convincing his wolf that she wasn't an emotional threat that was the problem, because she was on so many levels.

Thereasa was responsible for the damaged vampire currently secluded in Andrei and Loretta's home, just two doors down. She was responsible for his torture, his scars, both physical and emotional, and his life almost being lost. Rafe had granted sanctuary to Pietro de la Rios so he could hopefully one day heal from his nightmares. Now he was bringing the instrument of that ordeal into his compound and that weighed heavy on the Alpha's mind.

The other issue was what she represented to the vampire/were alliance. The harmony they had spent so many years working to foster and improve was now significantly damaged with the events that had occurred up at the Praetorian compound. The pack had sided against the vampires and he was sure that wouldn't be something they would forget in a hurry. Keeping Reasa safe from any possible vampire justice placed the pack in danger of a possible attack. Rafe didn't think it would come to that but he had to consider all options.

Then there were the personal issues that affected the Alpha. He had given his word to his sister and he was determined not to let her down. The urgency in her eyes as she asked for his promise told him that keeping the human woman safe was critical, though he knew not why. Annie had protected his pack for decades, taking each member into her heart and loving them the only way she knew how, wholeheartedly. He couldn't refuse her request. He had to protect her and hiding away the evidence of what she had now become was one way of doing that.

Turning his head, he met Lacey's pale green eyes and saw the unspoken concern in them. His beautiful mate was being so brave, putting the needs of the pack before her own fear and he couldn't love her any more than he did right then. The final personal issue that sent fear running through his soul was wrapped up with his mate and the lives they had created together. $\mathbb{W}w.n\sigma\mathcal{V}\ominus\mathbb{I}w\mathbb{O}\mathbb{R}\oplus.C\hat{o}^{(m)}$

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No one knew that Lacey was pregnant. They had intended to announce to the pack soon but events had overshadowed that. Now his children were inadvertently placed at risk by Liam's emotional outburst at the Praetorian Compound and they had no idea if their fragile minds had been damaged. Liam had affected strong, vampiric minds when he lost control. God only knew what impact that burst of emotional backlash would have on tiny unborn minds. The Alphas would have to speak to Mallen about it, but for the moment, they held their peace. $w\mathbb{W}\textcolor{teal}{w}.n\acute{o}^{(\vee)}e\mathbb{I}\otimes^{(\circ)}\mathbf{R}m.c\mathbf{o}\mathcal{M}$

Liam's empathy had always held him hostage. When things calmed down a bit, the guilt over what had happened would be hard for him to come to terms with. There was no telling how he would react if he discovered he had harmed his Alphas' babies. For the moment, the Vârcolac's mental shields were holding strong. Rafe didn't want the pack put at risk if Liam should lose control again so soon after the last time.

He leaned over and placed a comforting hand on Lacey's thigh, giving her a gentle squeeze. Her hand covered his and it broke his heart to feel the tremor running through her. "It will be okay, honey. Everything will be okay, I promise."

Tears welled up in her eyes and she quickly swallowed and blinked them away. Her mental voice was strong as she answered his private communication. "Let's get Liam and the rest of the pack settled. We can consult with Mallen once we've done that."

Rafe's pride in his mate knew no bounds and he couldn't have stopped himself from kissing her in that moment. He caught her lips with his, showering her with his love, both physically and mentally. He reluctantly pulled back as the door to the house in front of them flew open and Ashleigh Bryant flew out. $w\mathbb{W}w.n\mathbf{\alpha}^{(\vee)}e\mathbb{I}w\ominus\mathcal{R}\oplus.c\mathbf{o}\mathcal{M}$

Rafe and Lacey climbed out of the Jeep as the small blonde hurried towards them, concern on her face as she watched her son open the back door and step out quickly, turning to scoop Reasa back into his arms and help her from the vehicle.

The other Jeep had parked across from them and Kallum climbed out with Elina, Dara and Cassia at his side. Kothari and the other Weres who'd been protecting the Praetorian compound had opted to make their way back on foot, and wolves were beginning to pour into the compound. Kothari was already there, leaning against the large tree outside the Romanov house where Pietro was safely ensconced inside. There was no mistaking the blatant protective stance the lone Vârcolac held.

All eyes were fixated on Ashleigh though, as she skidded to an abrupt halt close to her son, her expression turning hard and hate filled. "No!" Her cry startled everyone, as did her expression. Usually there was no one more compassionate than Ashleigh but her voice dripped venom as she pointed at Reasa. "She is not welcome in my home!"

"Mom." Liam's quiet voice held a plea in it, his gaze turning troubled as he looked down at her.

"No!" Ashleigh cried again, her voice rising shrilly. "That woman tried to kill you, Liam. She tried to murder my son! She should have been executed on the spot!"

"Ashleigh!" The tall redheaded vampire appearing behind her managed to put such disapproval into her name that most others would have quelled at being subject to Nors Eriksson's displeasure. His mate rounded on him, fury in her deep brown eyes, as well as disbelief.

"She enters my house and I will leave, Nors. I will not stay under the same roof as that woman."