

## Chapter 534

Nors moved forward, understanding her need to protect their son. He felt the same need but could take a step back to analyse all the variables in play. Yes, the woman in his son's arms had tried to kill him. However, that threat was now nullified and Liam had claimed her as his mate. To take her from him would do more damage than being shot by a poisoned bullet. His mate was reacting emotionally and wasn't able to see that right now.

He pulled Ashleigh's protesting body against his, wrapping her in a bear hug. "Hmmm guess that means I'd have to go on the hunt again," he murmured against her temple, dropping a soft kiss there as he sent soothing love down their mate bond. "We haven't done that for a while...could be fun."

"Let me go!" Ashleigh's tried to free herself, tears running down her face as she wriggled against him. She couldn't believe he was making jokes when their son's would-be murderer was right there in front of them. She couldn't believe he was siding against her, was going to allow that woman into their home.

"Take the woman inside, son," Nors said, stroking his mate's back as she struggled harder and kicked out at him. "Go on. I'll talk to your mother."

Liam stared at his father for a long moment before his feet moved forward and he hurried inside with his precious bundle. His mother's rejection of his mate hurt so much but his need to protect Reasa overrode every other instinct within him. He had to take care of her. His mother had to understand that, didn't she?

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Without another word, Nors nodded his head to Rafe and scooped Ashleigh up into his arms, turning to run into the surrounding trees away from the compound.

"I'll stay with Liam until they come back," Elina announced, heading up the steps into the house. She closed the door as Aaron arrived at the waiting group.

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"What do I need to know?" the blond Were asked as he surveyed the tense faces.

Rafe turned to him, "We need two perimeters in place. Make sure Pietro has sufficient protection at all times. Be especially alert for large build-ups of vampires in the vicinity. If anyone sees anything out of the ordinary I am to know straight away."

A frown marred Aaron's face as he regarded his friend intently. "We're expecting trouble from the vampires?"

"I don't think so but there's no harm in being cautious," the Alpha answered, looping an arm around his mate's waist and turning to head towards his house. "Kallum can bring you up to speed on things. There's something I need to take care of right now." He spotted Mallen in the growing crowd and indicated with a slight nod of his head that he wanted to see him.

Aaron watched them leaving, his gut telling him something major was going on with the Alphas but it was his job to take care of the pack when Rafe was busy, so he quirked an enquiring eyebrow at Kallum.wŴW.NôveLwOrM.CoM

"Probably best to get the perimeters set up first and then we can sit down and have a long talk about what's happened," the Vârcolac said in a quiet tone. He wasn't sure how much Rafe wanted to be known within the pack and there were a number of people now gathered. It was prudent to update Aaron privately and then he and Rafe could decide who else needed to know.

"Okay, let's get moving then." Aaron began calling out names and issuing instructions and the pack began to mobilise, the soldiers heading off out into the forest as the crowd dissipated.

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"How could you?" Ashleigh glared at her mate, tears of fury in her eyes as he stood there regarding her with a solemn expression on his face. In all their years together, he had never once gone against her wishes...well there had been once when she'd run from him but that didn't count. She'd been young and foolish then, coming to terms with a grief that had almost sent her rogue. She couldn't really hold that against him but this -- this was completely different.

Their son had almost died and the woman responsible for that was now in their home! How Nors could allow that was beyond her. Her eyes were full of accusation and hurt as she squared up to him. If anything else happened to Liam because of his actions, she would never forgive him for it.

"Ash, you need to calm down and think about this logically," Nors sighed, running a hand through his auburn hair. "I know what happened to Liam was frightening. It scared the living daylights out of me too but he's fine and the situation has been dealt with. He is no longer in any danger."

"She is in our house!" Ashleigh yelled, her angry tears overflowing. "That womanshot our son with poison, Nors! The fact he's immune to it is a moot point. She didn't know that. She wanted to murder him. How can you just accept her being in the pack, let alone our own home?"

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"Because this is much bigger than just Liam." Nors moved away, striding over to one of the largest oak trees and sitting down against its base. "This involves the entire pack, our relationship with the vampires, my standing on the Ancient Council, my centuries of friendship with Caleb. This could mean civil war is coming and everyone being ripped apart and placed in unconscionable positions. And yes, this is about our son too, Ashleigh. That woman, as you call her, is his mate. Do you want to throw her out, have her executed? You really want to hurt Liam so badly that he may turn rogue?"

His words echoed in the small clearing, crashing over Ashleigh and giving her pause. Her fear at knowing their son was hurt had almost driven her insane. Rafe's edict that they had to stay with the pack until he investigated what had happened had been more than she could bear. Feeling so helpless, being unable to protect her child...she had to do something, anything to try to keep him safe now.

That woman couldn't be her son's mate. It had to be a mistake. If she truly was then she didn't know how she was going to be able to reconcile her past actions. If she couldn't accept her, if the would-be assassin in their midst could start a civil war... Words failed her as she tried to ignore what her mate was saying, tried to find some way out of the mess so their lives could go back to normal. There had to be a way...there just had to!