

Chapter 535

Nors watched the play of emotions crossing his mate's face and it was all he could do to sit there and let her work it out in her own mind. Every instinct within him wanted to gather Ashleigh into his arms and sooth her but he knew she wasn't ready for that yet. When Liam had been hurt, he'd thought his heart would stop beating. His fear for his son had been boundless but his fear for his mate had been even more so. She had been through so much pain in her life, so much grief that had almost been too much for her to stand. Losing Liam would have killed her.

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He understood her reaction to Reese. He wasn't feeling particularly kind-spirited towards the woman either but he was older and had long ago learned that not everything was black and white. It would harm their son more to try to remove Reese from his life. They had to protect the woman to protect their son. Maybe, over time, he would find some forgiveness in his heart for what she'd done. For now, all he could do was be as civil as possible and try to help Ashleigh come to terms with things so she could too.

"Come here." Nors held out his hand, holding his breath as he saw first rejection on Ashleigh's face and then defeat. He hated to see her in so much pain, pain that he couldn't really alleviate because it was something she had to deal with in her own way.

He let out a breath as she moved towards him, sinking down to the ground and throwing her arms around him, burying her head in his chest. "This is wrong, Nors. This is just wrong. I don't know how to handle this. I don't think I can ever accept her into our family and if I can't then I'm going to lose Liam."

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Ashleigh's quiet weeping tore at his heart and he cradled her closely, soothing her as best he could. "I know it's hard, love. It's not easy for me either, but she is his. There is a long road ahead for all of us but one day she will bring our son the happiness he's lacked for so long in his life. He deserves that chance, Ash. We have to give it to him, support his choice, and stand with him. He's our boy."

"How could she want to hurt him if she's his mate? Mates don't do that, they protect each other."

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"Vampires are always slower to acknowledge being a mate to a Were, you know that, love. It took me a long time to admit it and look at what Cedar and Loretta went through trying to get the twins to accept them. Just think how Reese will feel when she does finally acknowledge the mating. Can you even begin to imagine the depth of her pain when she realises she almost killed her mate?"

Nors watched the play of emotions crossing his mate's face and it was all he could do to sit there and let her work it out in her own mind. Every instinct within him wanted to gather Ashleigh into his arms and sooth her but he knew she wasn't ready for that yet. When Liam had been hurt, he'd thought his heart would stop beating. His fear for his son had been boundless but his fear for his mate had been even more so. She had been through so much pain in her life, so much grief that had almost been too much for her to stand. Losing Liam would have killed her.

He understood her reaction to Reasa. He wasn't feeling particularly kind-spirited towards the woman either but he was older and had long ago learned that not everything was black and white. It would harm their son more to try to remove Reasa from his life. They had to protect the woman to protect their son. Maybe, over time, he would find some forgiveness in his heart for what she'd done. For now, all he could do was be as civil as possible and try to help Ashleigh come to terms with things so she could too.

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He understood her reaction to Raasa. He wasn't feeling particularly kind-spirited towards the woman either but he was older and had long ago learned that not everything was black and white. It would harm their son more to try to remove Raasa from his life. They had to protect the woman to protect their son. Maybe, over time, he would find some forgiveness in his heart for what she'd done. For now, all he could do was be as civil as possible and try to help Ashleigh come to terms with things so she could too.

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"I hope it rips her apart!" Ashleigh's voice dripped venom, her tears still falling, hatred in her heart for the other women.

"No you don't." Nors rocked her gently, stroking her back as he kissed the top of her head. "You're upset right now and that's understandable, but you would never wish for anything that would hurt Liam in any way and Reese's pain would surely do that. It's okay to be angry and afraid, Ash. It's not okay to hold onto the hate for too long though. You've seen what pain and damage that can do. You don't want that for Liam or for us."

Sobbing, Ashleigh held her mate tighter, hate warring with her natural compassionate nature. She could understand the logic in Nors' words but she couldn't rein in her emotions enough to really heed them at the moment. Maybe one day she'd be able to but today wasn't that day. The hatred ruled her as if it was tangible. She wanted to rip Reese to pieces, luxuriating in her screams. Her wolf demanded it even as her human side fought the instinct. "Help me, Nors," she pleaded, raising wet eyes to her mate. "Help me."

"Always, I will always be here for you. We'll get through this together as a family and we will help Liam and Reese too. You are strong and compassionate, loving and tender. These more negative emotions will ease and you will find forgiveness in your heart because that is who you are, Ashleigh Bryant. That is why I love you so much. I have faith in you, my mate. Now have some faith in yourself."

Nors kissed her slowly, sending all his love and support down their mate bond as she wept and clung onto him. He knew she had it in her to accept Reese into their family. It was just going to take a little time but she would prevail, because she was so much stronger than she believed herself to be. She'd come through too much not to be a strong wolf and amazing woman. He would have faith in her until she had recovered hers.

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Mellen regarded his Alphas with a small frown on his face. He could see their concern but he wasn't sure if he could alleviate it. They were dealing with the unknown here. "So, when Liam lost control, he projected out emotions like a weapon?" He asked the question just to formalise it in his mind as it was nothing he'd ever come across before. Rafe nodded, his arms wrapped around Lacey who was watching the doctor anxiously.

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Mallen stood up, pacing towards the fireplace in the study, stopping and resting a hand against the tall mantelpiece. "I have to be honest here, I just don't know what kind of effect that could have on foetal minds. The fact that he damaged vampiric minds is frightening. None of the Weres were affected so that could mean the outburst wasn't sustained enough or strong enough to damage Were minds, which are notoriously difficult to manipulate as we all know. Then there's the question posed of whether or not your babies' minds have even begun to develop yet to be placed in danger."

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He tried to give Lacey a reassuring smile. "You've just started your second trimester. Though not conclusive in any manner, there is research out there, a hypothesis that babies' minds develop and mature in the third trimester. We don't really know for sure though. My gut instinct is the babies are safe but I don't have the science to back that up. I can do tests, we could try to take EEGs of their brains as the pregnancy progresses, but I'm thinking the way forward here is to ask Annie to see if she can sense them with her skills. She's particularly in tune with sensing new thought patterns."

"Annie isn't here at the moment," Rafe interjected, trying to remain as calm as he could under the circumstances. He was worried for his son and daughter, concerned about the level of anxiety Lacey was exhibiting.

"Gerd? Caleb? Maybe one of the Vârcolec?"

"I don't think Caleb wants to see any of us right now," Lacey said with a hint of a quiver in her voice. "Gerd is away with Annie and I don't want any of the Vârcolec to be aware of this at the moment. It might feed back to Liam and we don't want that. He needs some time to work through his own issues. We don't want to risk a repeat of the earlier incident."

Rafe nodded his agreement even though he was as anxious as his mate to have some answers. If they needed to wait a few more days then that was what they had to do. "We'll wait until Annie comes back. This is just between us for now, Mellen."

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