

Chapter 545

"She's weeping again."

Liam's softly spoken words had Ashleigh looking up from her book to see her son standing in the living room doorway. His large frame almost filled the entire space as he leaned against the side of the wall with his arms crossed. The anxiety in his eyes hurt her heart but she couldn't bring herself to care about the woman lying in the room above her head.

Nors had said to give it time, but she still felt nothing but hatred for the former vampire who had tried to kill her son. Liam's compassion shone from his eyes. It was simply beyond her comprehension how anyone could look at her baby and see a monster worth killing. Ashleigh had lost so much already in her life that the mere thought of losing her son was the final straw. Her heart had hardened and she didn't know if it would ever thaw, despite the faith her mate had in her.

"I don't know what to do, Mom."

Turning away from Liam, she looked back down at her book though she couldn't read a word through the tears swimming in her eyes. It hurt to turn away from him but she couldn't help it. "You know I'm not the best person to speak to about this, Liam. You should talk to your father if you need advice in this matter." God, even her voice sounded cold and hard; a far cry from what she was usually like.

"Mom, please don't hate her." Liam entered the room, coming to rest on his knees beside her chair at the open fire. He placed his hands against hers, closing the book and gripping her tightly. "I know what she did was wrong and understand why you find it hard to forgive, but she's my mate. Hating her is like hating half of me."

Wish I could do this for you, Liam, I really do, but I can't forgive what she did to you. If you hadn't been immune to that poison I would have lost you. I know you probably think I'm being selfish, son, but I can't help the way I feel. I don't mean to hurt you by rejecting her. I know I stand the chance of losing you by feeling this way and I hate her even more for that because, either way, that woman will have won and taken you from me.

The tears she was struggling to hide fell and splashed on their joined hands. Ashleigh struggled to hold in a sob, hearing herself echo the woman above. "I wish I could do this for you, Liam, I really do, but I can't forgive what she did to you. If you hadn't been immune to that poison I would have lost you. I know you probably think I'm being selfish, son, but I can't help the way I feel. I don't mean to hurt you by rejecting her. I know I stand the chance of losing you by feeling this way and I hate her even more for that because, either way, that woman will have won and taken you from me."

"Never!" Liam whispered, his eyes moist as he gathered his mother close. Surely she didn't really believe that she would lose him? His parents were everything to him and always would be. He could feel his mom shaking as she tried to hold back her tears and it made him want to cry as much as Reasa's weeping did. He had to comfort his mom somehow, so he held her even tighter and stroked a hand down her back. "No matter what happens I will always love you, Mom. You will never lose me. We'll find some way to work through this, I know we will."

Hugging him tightly Ashleigh was ashamed to let her tears flow. She was Liam's mother and it was her job to comfort him and keep him safe, and yet, he was the one who comforted her despite his own pain. What kind of mother did that make her? Why couldn't she be strong enough to work through her ambivalence and try to find something worth liking in her son's mate?

Just the thought of it made her feel physically sick. How were they ever going to resolve this if she couldn't learn to get over what had happened? "I'm so sorry, Liam. Forgive me."

"I'll take it from here, son."

Nors entered the room, crossing quickly to retrieve his mate from his son and cradle her close. He had heard Liam's passionate speech and felt so proud of him. He understood the dilemma his son was in, having suffered something similar with Freya and Ashleigh in the past. It was hard to love two people in different ways and have them at odds with each other. Maybe that was why it was easier for him having Reasa in their home. He didn't want his son to lack support as he endured that awful feeling of being caught in the middle.

"Why don't you head over to the community hall and help out?" he said, brushing away Ashleigh's tears with a gentle hand. "I believe Lily is on lunch duty and we all know how interesting that will be." Privately he sent a rush of love down their mate bond. "I'll try and help Liam while you're there, love."

Pulling herself together, Ashleigh gave them both a weak smile and smoothed her hands down the side of her jeans. "Yes, someone has to save us all from Lily's cooking." She met Liam's gaze and saw no condemnation there and her heart twisted painfully; he didn't hate her for rejecting his mate. It made her feel even more ashamed.

"Stop, Ash. Liam understands and is willing to wait for you to work through this. Don't think about yourself that way. You don't deserve it."

"I'm failing my son, Nors. Logically I know it, and yet my wolf will not accept that woman. I feel as if I'm being ripped apart inside and I should be strong enough to handle this."

"Enough, Ashleigh. Go bang some pots and pans around until you work this self-loathing out of your system. It's irritating my vampiric side and I think it's better for Liam to have one of us balanced at the moment." Nors' tone was curt and it had the desired effect of shaking some sense into his mate. She straightened her spine and shot him a pointed look. He didn't like being harsh with his Ashleigh but at the moment it seemed to be the only thing that helped shake away her melancholy.*Will you ever love me?*

"Fine, I'll see you for lunch."*(w)Will you ever love me?*

The two males watched her leave, both frowning with concern. Ashleigh's current behaviour was a worry. Nors was even considering discussing it with Mallen to see if there was some underlying medical diagnosis. If there was, then maybe they could treat it.

"I'm worried about mom."

Nors sighed and clapped his son reassuringly on the back, his pride evident. "I know, son. I am too. I'm also worried about Reasa. She's been inconsolable for an entire day now. What has Mallen had to say about that?"

Liam turned troubled eyes up to the ceiling. "He left something to put into her drink but I'm loath to do that. While it would knock her out for a while, it feels wrong to me, as if I would be breaking her trust in some way or lying to her. I don't want to start my life with my mate by drugging her."*(c)Will you ever love me?*

"As opposed to your mate trying to murder you?"

His father's dry quip teased a small smile onto Liam's face. While the words were true, it still didn't feel right to sneakily drug Reasa just because it hurt so much to hear her cry. She was going through so much pain that he felt he had to live each moment with her, that maybe if she saw him suffer too she would realise she wasn't alone. "I can't do it, Dad."

"Then tell her," Nors sighed, rubbing at the back of his neck. The constant noise of weeping was starting to give him a sore head and he'd barely been home ten minutes. He was ready to join Ashleigh at the community hall just for some peace and quiet. "Give her the choice of taking the sleeping potion or not. You never know, she may want the respite of oblivion from the emotions she's going through."