

Chapter 548

"My name is Ashleigh. I am Liam's mother, and a Were. I am mated to Nors, an Ancient vampire. I figured I'd answer all your questions at once so we can move on as quickly as possible. Before we go any further, I feel obligated to tell you that while I will not harm you in any way, I have no empathy towards you. You came here to murder my son and for that, I will always hate you. For his sake, I will keep you safe, but never think that I do this for you."

The words were blunt but honest and Reasa could understand the wolf's position on an intellectual level. She could even respect it. It was refreshing to know exactly where she stood with at least one person in her new environment. "Noted."

Ashleigh entered further into the room, scrutinising the woman her son had chosen as his. She was attractive, there was no denying that, and she had to concede that despite all the weeping, Reasa had a core of steel somewhere deep inside to be able to take her harsh words and accept them without flinching. She didn't want to think anything positive about the former vampire though, so she firmed up her mental barriers.

"Your presence here is harming Liam. I was overruled about having you in my home when you first arrived, but after today, it appears my reluctance has proven to be correct. I will talk with our Alpha to find another place for you to stay. You need to start adjusting to your changed circumstances. Lying and weeping in this room is not adjusting."

Reasa bristled at her tone. Yes, she may have a right to judge her when it came to matters of her son, but what right did this wolf have to judge how she dealt with becoming human? Swinging her legs over the side of the bed she rose and crossed to the window, staring out at the freedom denied her. "I need to start adjusting? Who are you to tell me what I need to be doing? I have had everything ripped away from me, everything that made me who I am. What gives you the right to lecture me on how I should or shouldn't be handling it?"

A long silence ensued, so long that Reasa thought the other woman had left the room. She turned to see the wolf staring down at the carpet, a frown on her pretty face. Ashleigh appeared to come to some decision as her head raised and she met her gaze.

"A long time ago I lost everything dear to me." Ashleigh's voice faltered slightly and she frowned again before swallowing hard. "My entire family was wiped out by vampires who attacked my former pack. I was young, lost and so very alone. Despite the love of my pack, I wanted to give up. Sometimes at night I would lie awake weeping, longing to be dead with my family. I was moments away from turning rogue, so I know what it is like to lose everything, to feel so alone that you long for death. Our circumstances may be different but the essence of the emotions is the same."

Despite herself, Reasa found her interest piqued by the wolf's admission. The emotion in the other woman's voice told her she still, to this day, suffered from the loss of her family; however she had the strength to go on with her life. "How did you survive?" The question was spontaneous and surprising, but she couldn't retract the words now that they were out of her mouth.

Warmth spread across the petite blonde's expression, her brown eyes sparkling with such a wealth of love that Reasa felt her mouth drop open slightly. The transformation from the cold woman who had entered the room was staggering.

"A vampire saved me," Ashleigh answered, her lips curving in small smile. "Through all the blood and death, the tears and grief, Nors pushed everything out of his way and took me under his protection. He supported me, held me as I grieved; he was a rock and a shining light at every turn. He loved me and waited for over a year for me to heal and accept him as mine. Without him, I would have been lost forever."

"You placed your life in the hands of a vampire when they were responsible for the death of all you loved?" Reasa wasn't sure if the woman before her was incredibly brave or incredibly stupid. If a species had taken everything from her, she would never turn to them for comfort. That was why the only saving grace with being in the pack was they were wolves and not vampires. A vampire had stripped her immortality from her. Now that she was vulnerable, she wouldn't trust another vampire as far as she could throw one.

Ashleigh's lips twitched again. "Yes, I did, and continued to do so despite being kidnapped and tortured by the last vampire council, too. You see, I'm not like you, Thereasa. I don't tar an entire species with the same brush just because of the actions of a few. I don't hate and fear a race just because they're not something I understand."

There was no mistaking the barb being thrown in her direction, and Reasa acknowledged it even as she ignored it. If this woman thought anything she said would change her mind, she was wrong, and she didn't see the point in reiterating what she'd already said to Liam. She was sure his mother was smart enough to know it.

Reasa moved back to the bed, her thoughts confused. Ashleigh's honesty impressed her she had to admit that. If what she said was true, she had endured much pain and suffering at the hands of vampires and yet she didn't condemn everyone for it. In fact, she had mated with a vampire and, from her expression when she talked of her mate, it was clear that she loved him with all her heart. This petite woman had a core of strength that was to be admired. It mattered nothing to Reasa that Ashleigh hated her. She had been hated by many of the vampires in her coven, but respected for her strength and wisdom. That was something she could understand.

"Do you imagine your son will be the one to rescue me?" Her tone dripped with mockery and bitterness.

"I hope with every fibre of my being that he isn't your mate, Reasa. If you never believe a word that comes out of my mouth, believe in that, at least."

"Oh, I do, Ashleigh." Tilting her head to the side, she perused the wolf for a moment before smiling.

"You know, you would have made a good vampire. You would have thrived in a European coven with your strength and bluntness. I would possibly even have liked you."

Ashleigh skewered her with her gaze, considering her words before speaking. Her wolf was paying very careful attention to the other woman, though was strangely silent during their conversation. It watched, and for what, she wasn't sure.

Standing straight, she met Reasa's gaze. "You're not a vampire any more. You're human. You need to learn to deal with that and stop alluding to a past that will never come around again. I will speak to Rafe and let you know of his decision." She turned to leave the room but halted at the door, glancing over her shoulder.

"I would never have liked you, Thereasa, even if I had been a vampire in your coven. I could never like someone who holds such warped hatred in her heart." Ashleigh closed the door quietly behind her, not waiting for a reply.

"And just where do you think she should go?"

Ashleigh and Nors stood silently in Rafe's study, their Alpha pacing up and down the room, having listened to their request to rehouse Thereasa. He appeared resistant to the move even though he hadn't actually sanctioned Liam claiming his mate in the first instance. He hadn't argued when Liam had taken Reasa into his home, so he had sort of given his consent. Rafe knew that his mind had been on other things at the time and he'd welcomed not having to think about the semantics of having Reasa in the pack.

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"She's too fragile to be anywhere near Kothari, and Andrei and Loretta's is out just for the fact that Pietro is there," Rafe sighed, halting his pacing and walking around his desk to sit down. He motioned for them to sit as he leaned on his desk and rubbed a hand over his face. He was Alpha and he didn't get to duck decisions. His pack relied on him to do what was in their best interests.

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"Cedar and Alexei don't have room for her with the girls there and there's no way in hell she's coming here. We're full up as it is with mine and Aaron's brood here."

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A low chuckle came from Nors' lips that quickly developed into a full-blown laugh. "Guess that leaves Freya and Dayton."

Rafe blinked, automatically shaking his head. "You want to leave Thereasa to your sister's tender mercy? Are you really that mean, Nors?"

Ashleigh was looking at her mate too, with a deep frown marring her forehead. Had he lost his mind? Freya would likely rip the other woman apart for what she'd done to Liam. She loved her nephew as if he were her own son.

"Come on, Freya isn't that bad," Nors sighed, coming to his sister's defence. She'd mellowed somewhat since mating with Dayton. Okay, she wasn't a typical pack member, but she wasn't bad enough to warrant this reaction from his mate and Alpha.

"Think about it for a moment. Dayton has experience handling challenging females. Elina knows how important Thereasa is to Liam; therefore, she will work hard to protect her for that reason alone. Freya is the only female vampire in the pack so she should be able to relate to the woman on some level. Freya also has had to learn to find her humanity, so, that's another thing they have in common. Most importantly, Reasa will be with family and that will make this a bit easier on Liam. I think it's the perfect solution."

Ashleigh and Rafe swapped gazes. When he put it like that, it wasn't as off the wall as they'd first thought.

"There is a certain kind of logic to it," Rafe conceded, beginning to like the idea more as he mulled it over. However, he wouldn't order a member of his pack to do something they didn't want to; not if it wasn't crucial to protecting the pack. "They have to agree to it though."

He used his Alpha bond to communicate telepathically with them. "Freya, Dayton, can you come over for a moment. I need to run something past you."

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