

Chapter 177

Ashleigh took a deep breath as Freya parked the car outside the small Gallery. The sign above the doorway was simple and to the point D A Art. For the hundredth time she wondered if coming here was a good idea. She had agonised over it for so long Nors has finally taken the decision out of her hands and all but ordered her to go and do it.

A faint smile curved her lips as she thought of her mate's stubborn expression. He had become so tired of her procrastinating that he'd told her to get it over and done with so they could get some form of normality back into their lives. Then he had ordered Freya to accompany her because he didn't want Liam being without both parents.

His fierce protectiveness of their son always brought a rush of deep love to her soul. Nors had taken to fatherhood as if he were born to it despite the fact that he was over two thousand years old and a Vampire to boot.

Vampires had never been able to have children up until they had mated with Weres so had no reference points to work from when they had suddenly started to become fathers. But that didn't seem to get in the way of the strong, dominant men who were now part of the Armand-Hanlon pack.

Each vampire was totally besotted with their offspring and so fiercely protective of them that it bordered on paranoia. It brought many rolled eyes from their mates as their over protectiveness kicked in and the poor little ones struggled to get any kind of freedom to just be themselves. It also made them love their mates more because they knew no harm would ever come to their children.

The only vampire who had an issue with all the changes that had happened lately was the woman sitting at Ashleigh's side, Freya Eriksson. The vampire was scowling darkly and trying hard not to show it. Her sister-in-law was struggling painfully hard with everything but she was trying her best to accept it because it made Nors so happy.

Ashleigh's relationship with the other woman had built slowly over the last few years but it was strong now, respect and affection growing between them. Freya was even accepting of little Liam and beginning to display the same protective instincts as Nors.

She never said anything but Ashleigh knew Liam was adored by his aunt and she would watch over him for eternity. It made her love Freya even more though she was careful not to verbalise her feelings because the vampire wouldn't like it if she did.

"Are we just going to sit here?" Freya sighed wearily, fighting down her irritation. She didn't want to be here but she had promised Nors she would take care of his mate when he couldn't.

Not that she really minded spending time with Ashleigh that much. The other woman was the closest thing she had to a friend. She accepted her boundaries, didn't try to turn her into something she wasn't. She was the mother of the most adorable little being to have graced her life and she was Nors' mate.

All those things made Ashleigh special to Freya though she would never admit that out loud. Admitting it could place Ashleigh in danger. Freya had many enemies in the world. As long as no one knew she cared about the little blonde and her child then they would always be safe from those enemies. [www.nove1world.com](#)

Not that she or Nors would allow anything to harm them but Freya hadn't had anyone who was special to her before, not like Nors who could take care of himself. It was all new to her and she reacted as the mated vampires did, she became overprotective. So she kept her feelings for them closely hidden but she knew the woman beside her was aware that she would protect her and her son with her life if need be.

She turned to regard Ashleigh her green eyes flashing with a little bit of humour as she took in her pensive expression. "He's hardly going to eat you," she said with a hint of mockery in her tone. "If he tries, I will protect you."

Ashleigh burst out laughing at the total conviction in Freya's tone. There was no artifice involved, no grandiose boasting, it was a simple fact. If Dayton Alexander did anything to upset her then Freya would upset him right back, and probably in a more violent manner.

"Try not to overreact," she smiled, unclipping her seatbelt and stepping out of the car.

She tucked her blonde hair behind her ears in a nervous gesture as she waited for Freya to join her. "Try to remember that he's been through a lot. He most likely will not be pleased to see me and will react accordingly. Let me handle it."

Freya rolled her eyes and headed towards the door to the Gallery. "I will be on my best behaviour," she drawled turning her head to look back and make sure the younger woman was following her. "Unless he upsets you," she added with an unrepentant grin on her exquisite face.

Ashleigh hurried into the Gallery after her, slightly afraid of just what Freya would do and then realising that the other woman had deliberately goaded her into the Gallery with her words. A faint smile curved her lips. Freya was so like her brother sometimes it was scary.

Both woman stopped as the door closed silently behind them, staring at the large abstract painting on the far wall.

Ashleigh felt chills run through her as she stared at the raw fury and aching loss within the painting. Tortured was the first thought that came to her mind. The work of art screamed of a tortured soul crying out to the world.

Her keen eye caught the signature, D Alex. It was how Dayton signed all his work. The date just beneath the signature registered and she knew immediately that he had been affected by David's death after all, even if he hadn't come to the memorial. Maybe he wouldn't be so adverse to seeing her as she thought he would be.

Freya eyed the canvas with an appraising eye. She was actually quite stunned by what she was witnessing but managed to contain her expression behind a tight neutral guard. D Alex? This Dayton Alexander character was 'The' D Alex!

She had always had a liking for fine art and had heard about a new artist showing in Japan while she was there. She hadn't attended the opening night of the show but she had managed along at some point. The raw emotion in the abstract work on the walls of the Gallery had fascinated her. She had even bought a couple of pieces which now hung in her new home not far from Nors' house.

She frowned slightly as she thought of the other place she had, her special place where she retreated to when she needed perfect solitude. She didn't want to think how many other pieces she had up there, what that would say to anyone if they could see it.

Finding out she had wolf art displayed in her home was mildly irritating but she wouldn't take them down. She loved the pain and suffering within the work. Some would view her as cruel to take such pleasure from it but part of her related to it. Sometimes she became so tired of her very existence that she could understand the blatant desire to cease to exist which read within the work of D Alex. [www.nove1world.com](#)

The door directly beneath the painting swung open and their eyes dropped down to the man who was suddenly framed in the doorway.

Ashleigh's heart thudded hard in her chest as she looked at Dayton Alexander in the flesh for the first time. She had seen him so many times in the numerous family photos she possessed and had always wondered how she would feel when they finally met.

She was unprepared for the feeling of kinship which wrapped around her as she stared into a pair of deep blue eyes that contained no emotion at all. The large man before her was tense and alert and not the least welcoming but it didn't stop her wanting to reach out and wrap her arms around him to give him comfort.

She contained herself, knowing he would reject any attempt at affection from another Were. She was a stranger to him even though she knew just about everything there was to know about him. And if he was overly aggressive it would just set Freya off and a pissed off Freya was a nightmare to contain.

He was huge as most male Were's were, standing at six foot three and blocking out the entire doorway with his wide shoulders. Muscles rippled under his black T-shirt as he gripped the doorframe tightly. He was handsome in the photographs she had but the camera failed to capture just how stunningly gorgeous he was with his hard, chiselled jaw and high sweeping cheekbones.

His expression was closed and guarded but it didn't take anything away from his incredible male beauty or the sheer power that exuded from him. It didn't matter how long he had been gone from the pack, his former Beta status was still evident in the way he held himself at the ready, waiting for an attack to come.

Ashleigh ran her eyes over his long hair which was loose and lying in luxurious waves around his shoulders. It looked silky soft and invited a woman to touch it, just so she could gnash her teeth in frustration that it was so much more beautiful than hers.

The streak of grey was a shock against the rich, warm brown shade. She had heard of that occurring before, usually in humans. Sometimes something so awful happened that the colour literally bleached out of a person's hair overnight. No one had told her it had happened to her brother's best friend. [www.nove1world.com](#)

Dayton didn't speak, merely let his eyes linger on the vampire briefly, categorising her as lethally dangerous but not appearing to be hostile at the moment. The three seconds his eyes remained on her told him everything he needed to know about her.

She was flawlessly beautiful, her hair a deep brown streaked with alternating strands of gold and red, her eyes a vibrant, piercing shade of green. She was cold, ruthless and no doubt a pitiless killer. She was a typical vampire. And not a threat. [www.five1world.com](#)

The real threat came from the exquisite blonde who stood at her side. She was smaller, her eyes a deep brown, her blonde her framing her face in silky strands. He was instantly on alert, his gaze connecting with the Were and automatically shying away from the compassion he saw in hers. He now understood why her scent seemed familiar. There was only one person who's scent he would recognise even though he had never met her.