

Chapter 200

Aaron couldn't work out whether to push or to let it be for the moment. Dayton's arrival was in itself a big step; push him too hard, too soon, and he would disappear again.

"So, what's the story with the wildcat?"

At Aaron's change of tactic his brother turned to stare at him intently for a moment before returning to the sofa. "Your guess is as good as mine," he admitted, though his lips did curl in a slight smile as he spoke of Rayne. "She turned up one day not long after I left the pack. Nothing I said or did would make her go away. Eventually I stopped trying. She comes and goes as she sees fit. Sometimes it's a few years between visits but she always turns up."

Aaron could hear honest affection in Dayton's voice and it piqued his curiosity further. "Stunning looking woman," he remarked casually.

Dayton's head whipped up and his gaze clashed with his. "It's nothing sexual!" His tone was defensive, a trace of anger in it. He locked gazes with his brother for another long moment; then he relaxed again and a genuine smile crossed his face. "Better not let Jen hear you admiring Rayne. I get the impression your mate would not be very pleased about that."

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A loud laugh escaped Aaron at the thought of just how much verbal abuse he'd take from Jen if she caught him admiring another woman. But his laughter was prompted by more than just that thought. For a brief moment he had seen the real Dayton: the brother he had been before Faith's death.

"I dare say she wouldn't be," he agreed, smiling widely. "I talked to Rafe before coming up. He tells me Freya Eriksson has set her sights on you. I was obviously doing it all wrong before I met Jen: I should have played hard to get. That appears to be the way to get beautiful women throwing themselves at your feet."

Cold, hard fury swept through Dayton at the mention of the vampire's name. His jaw clenched hard and he had to fight to control the sudden, unexpected, eruption of anger. "It's not a laughing matter, Aaron."

His brother was instantly on the alert, his protective instincts kicking in. Something about Freya's behaviour had caused an intense reaction, and not a very healthy one either. His hackles rose immediately. "What did she do to you?"*uwww.m0vélw©:©.com*

Dayton met his brother's gaze. Gone was the amiable, likable Aaron and in his place was the strong, feral Beta who would destroy anything or anyone who tried to harm his family or his pack. He knew in that instant that his brother would stand at his side if he had to go up against the Ancient, even knowing that Freya would most likely kill them both.

Aaron's angry reaction calmed him down a little. It forced him to pause and wonder just why he was experiencing such an extreme reaction to Freya's game. Her behaviour had been outrageous; there was no getting away from that. But had she actually hurt him? The cut on his neck had been nothing. He'd suffered much worse growing up and in protecting the pack in his role as Beta. He hadn't even registered any pain from the cut because his anger had been so intense.

No; the pain she had inflicted hadn't been physical, it had been emotional. She had drunk his blood without his consent. She had put her hands on him for the second time without permission. She had kissed him--stolen his last memory of Faith's lips touching his.

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His fury was boundless because he was struggling to hide the truth from himself, the awful truth that was his ultimate betrayal of Faith. Before he had begged the vampire to stop, for a split second that had felt as if it lasted for eternity, he'd taken pleasure from the feel of Freya's soft lips against his. He'd wanted to kiss her back, had needed to let go of the sudden roaring hunger which had erupted deep inside him. That was what fuelled his rage and hatred of the vampire: she had made him want her, even if the need had lasted only a brief moment.

"She kissed me, Aaron," he finally admitted, disgust in his voice. "I didn't want her to but she did it anyway. The worst part of it was I liked it." Aaron had always been the one who could get him to talk, to admit the thoughts and feelings he wanted to conceal. It was as though the last fifty years hadn't happened as he sat with Aaron and told him things he probably wouldn't have admitted to anyone else. But it hurt to admit his betrayal; it wounded him so deeply it was like a festering sore inside.

Aaron knew what a blow this was to Dayton. He cursed Freya for pushing him, for forcing him to face something he just wasn't ready for. Indeed his brother might never be ready for another woman to enter his life. It wasn't even as though Freya gave a damn about Dayton. She was being sadistic, amusing herself because she was bored. He was going to have serious words with Nors about this. If Nors didn't get his sister in line there was going to be trouble.

"Leave Freya to us," he told his brother, his expression determined. "She'll be told in no uncertain terms to find her amusement elsewhere. Just don't do anything stupid like letting your anger cloud your judgement. Make no mistake, she's wilder than most vampires. She has a completely different way of looking at things and doesn't care about consequences. You've come to the pack for help. Let us help you."

Dayton stared at him, confusion on his face as he admired the man his brother had grown into.

"Why don't you hate me, Aaron? Why isn't anyone in the family angry at me?"

Compassion crossed Aaron's face--together with a muted expression of grief. "Because we loved her too, Day," he said quietly. "We miss Faith each and every day the same way you do, only we know our sense of loss pales into insignificance in comparison with the depths of your feelings."

His quiet statement broke Dayton further, tears welling up in his eyes as he looked down to hide them. He felt Aaron move, felt his arms come around him in a fierce hug and for the first time in over five decades Dayton Alexander let go, and began to weep. He tried to hold back the tears, tried to stifle the sobs that began to wrack his body painfully but he couldn't hold back the agony that welled up from deep within.

"Jen, take the kids and Rayne outside somewhere," Aaron conveyed through their mental bond, holding his brother tightly as he wept. He didn't want Dayton to be ashamed of his tears or worry that others had heard him cry.

He rocked Dayton tightly in his embrace. "Let it out, Day," he whispered. "Let it all out. You're safe here. Lean on me. I won't let you go."

Jen's sudden desire to go visit the community centre appeared strange to Rayne. As the other woman began shepherding her children down the stairs, Rayne opened up her senses completely, utilising another skill that she kept closely hidden. She reached out towards the room into which Aaron and Dayton had disappeared a while ago and let their emotions come to her.

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