

Chapter 201

The raw anguish emanating from Dayton was enough to drive her to her knees. Her eyes filled with tears and she took two involuntary steps towards the room before Jen's voice intruded by calling her name. She was desperate to go to her friend, to try and ease his pain, but he was with his family now. Aaron was with him and this was what Dayton needed. He would never be able to let go of Faith if he didn't allow his emotions free rein.

Swallowing back her tears, Rayne turned and forced herself downstairs after Jen and the children. Aaron would help Dayton; she knew he would. But it was hard to walk away; she was so used to being there for him when he needed her.

"Alexei, please!" Cedar sighed deeply as she watched her furious mate pace up and down the sitting room floor, muttering under his breath, his long blond hair swirling in agitation at each turn.

She had left the children with Loretta and Andrei while she tried to soothe her mate. Her acute distress at Dayton's rejection had set Alexei off in one of his protective furies. Aaron had helped as much as he could but she was starting to think that she'd have to ask Rafe to step in as Alpha. She didn't want to do that because she knew how much Alexei hated being 'handled', as he called it.

"Don't ask me to do what you know I can't, Cedar." He stopped to tower over her, his brown eyes full of molten fire, as she sat on the sofa with her hands clasped together.

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"You're incapable of acting like a civilised person?" she enquired dryly, refusing to be intimidated by him. He should have known by now that she didn't crumble very easily under his displeasure.

No, he had much more chance of getting around her with honey than he did with a stick. One deliciously wicked smile, one heated lust-filled glance and she was ready to do anything he wanted. Yelling at her didn't achieve anything except make her yell right back at him.

"The problem with you Alexanders is that you let everyone get away with far too much," he said coldly, ignoring her question. "When Andrei is being an ass I kick his, until he stops. Problem solved.

"But not you, Cedar. When your brothers rip your heart out you thank them for the abuse and let them get away with it. Well, not any more! I will not stand for any further abuse done to you. And if you don't like that, then tough shit. I don't care."

Cedar swallowed down her instant angry retort and fought the sudden need to start crying. If she broke down, Alexei would probably explode completely. The last time she'd seen him this angry was when she had tried to hurt herself to force the issue of their mating. Anger wasn't the solution to this problem; it would only inflame the situation.

Memories of that day so long ago gave her a new angle of approach. "How would you feel if I died, Alexei?"wŴw.(n)@vÉ⓪W(c)Rm.©Ⓜ

Her question was so unexpected that he took a step back, denial ripping through him at the thought of anything dreadful happening to her. He growled loudly, clenching his jaw tightly. "That will never happen." The words erupted in a hoarse voice.W(w)(w).(n)cvelwσ(r)m.cOm

She pressed her advantage, seeing him off balance. "What if it did, Alexei? What if the unimaginable did happen and I died? How would you feel?"

His expression turned into a dark scowl, denial clearly flashing in his eyes as he shook his head. "That has nothing to do with this," he bit out. His wolf was going insane inside his head, his feral vampire nature reacting to any possible danger to his mate.

"Answer me, Alexei. Answer the bloody question! How would you feel?" Her voice rose as she stood up and moved the two steps that took her toe to toe with him.

"It would kill me!" he roared back at her, fury and pain rendering his voice so guttural she could barely understand him. She knew she was hurting him but needed him to feel that hurt, to understand it as something so hard and painful it was tangible.

"That's how Dayton feels," she whispered with tears in her eyes. "He's felt that way for every day of the last fifty three years, ten months and twelve days since Faith died."

She watched his eyes widen with shock and she nodded her head slowly. "Yes, I know to the day when she died, love. My entire family does because that's the day we lost our sister, our daughter, and our brother. We feel Dayton's pain just as he does but what we feel is not even a tenth of his anguish."wwW.(n)©⓪©LWorm.čOm

The tears slipped over her cheeks and ran down in a silent river. Alexei cursed loudly and reached for her but she put her hand up to stop him. She knew he hated to see her cry, but she needed to finish this while she still could.

"It hurts that he won't let us in," she whispered, swallowing hard. "It hurts that we can't help him when we know he needs us so badly. But I'd shed a million tears for him if it would somehow bring Faith back. And I would shed two million more if that's what it took to bring my brother home to where he belongs. Here. With his family. So, please don't hate him, Alexei. Don't hurt him because of me. He's been hurt so badly already, in the worst way possible."

Alexei crushed his woman tightly to his chest, shame running through him as she wept because of him. He was so intent on others hurting her than he failed to realise that he was doing the exact thing that was infuriating him about her brother. "I'm sorry, Cedar," he breathed softly, stroking her back soothingly as he placed little kisses across her wet cheeks. "Forgive me, sweetheart. I didn't understand."

She sobbed a little more, holding her mate tightly while her erratic emotions ran their course. She knew the danger point had passed, that she'd gotten through his fury, that he was once more in control of himself. He was trying hard to fit into a world that he sometimes struggled so much to understand. He didn't always get it right, but he did work hard to learn from his mistakes.

"Please don't ever talk about dying again," Alexei ground out, framing her face in his big hands, a look of anguish in his eyes at the very thought of it. "I know why you did it--so I could understand the depth of your brother's pain--but please don't ever mention it again, Cedar. It rips me apart inside."

She kissed him gently, running her hands through his silky hair as he took over the kiss and stole her breath away with the sheer desperation of his mouth against hers.

"I'm sorry I had to resort to those tactics," she breathed against his lips once he let her up for air. "I needed you to understand, Alexei, and it was the only way."