

## Chapter 299

"Play nice, vampire," he growled inside her head.

She gave him a mock innocent look as her smile broadened slightly. Dayton's earlier grief was receding to be replaced by his playful side as his emotions dialled back down into something resembling normal. If she could keep distracting him by keeping him wondering what she was going to do next, then this visit would be a lot easier for both of them.

A stunning dark haired woman had appeared at Jared's side and Freya turned back to face Millicent Cooper, Jared's mate. She'd only seen the other woman on one occasion in the past as she tended to stay close to the Hanlon Compound with her children when not in the city with Jared.

"This is my mate, Millie," Jared introduced her. "Honey, this is Dayton and I think you've met Freya once before?"

"I have." Millie smiled in Freya's direction. "It's nice to see you again."

She turned stunning cobalt eyes on Dayton and her smile beamed even wider. "I'm so pleased to finally meet you. You are both welcome here anytime. Your mother and sister have been driving us insane the last few hours. Why don't you head over to your old place and say hello?"

She frowned slightly as she looked around at the gathering of nosey wolves who were watching the homecoming of one they'd thought lost for so long. "I'm surprised they weren't here to greet you," she mused.

"I warned them to give Day some time to meet with the Alphas before they descended upon him," Connor admitted. He had stood silently watching his brother's homecoming with a lump in his throat. He was still stunned that Dayton had returned to them and was diving into his Beta duties as a way to cope with it all.

"You gave your mother a Beta command?" Jared laughed loudly. "You are so going to pay for that, Connor Alexander."wWw.nôtreLw@rM.c©M

Connor flushed red and stared down at his feet. "She wouldn't stop phoning me," he muttered in his defence. His Ma was going to have his hide whether or not he was Jared's number two. It was embarrassing to admit that it didn't matter how big he got or how high in the pack he ranked, his mother would still singe his ears if she felt her little boy had done wrong.

Dayton knocked his knuckles against his brother's shoulder. "Don't worry Con; she'll be so overjoyed to have me home she'll probably let this one slide."

His brother's hopeful expression had them all laughing with the exception of Freya who was relaxed enough but still a little overawed with the easy way the wolves teased each other while completely ignoring the hierarchy of the pack. It was just so different to the vampire hierarchy it was hard to comprehend at times.

"Time to meet the rest of the clan," Dayton smiled down at her, hugging her tightly and pulling her through the assembled wolves towards a two storey wooden cabin at the far end of the compound.

It was clear the building was set quite deep into its surroundings. As the Alexander family were so numerous it only stood to reason they would have required a place of their own with enough rooms to raise six boisterous children. Freya felt her heart flip over as they neared the building, only the sharp intake of breath from Dayton forcing her to relax. She felt excitement as well as trepidation running through their mate bond so she did her best to soothe him.

The door suddenly flew open and a blonde woman with shoulder length curls flew down the three steps and launched herself into Dayton's arms. He'd barely enough time to release Freya before he caught the other woman and braced himself so he didn't fall backwards.

"You are in so much trouble," the woman ground out glaring over her shoulder at Connor who'd brought up the rear. "Ma is spitting nails, Con. You're going to hear about this for the next decade at least!"

She gave him a gloating smile and then started kissing Dayton's face with much enthusiasm. "God, I've missed you so much, Day! I can't believe you haven't come over sooner. Ma can't make up her mind whether to be pissed at you or to cuddle you to death. She's been a complete nightmare! And why didn't you dye your grey bit? Do you want to look old? And how did you find a second mate? Is this going to be a new family tradition? Are all us Alexanders going to have to mate with vampires? Okay, I know Jen's a wolf but first Cedar and now you? I don't know if I want to have a vampire mate!"

"Willow! Slow down, girl," Dayton laughed. His sister had managed to rattle off her litany with barely a breath between all her questions. Her natural exuberance was just as he remembered and he found himself immersing himself in her, luxuriating in all that was familiar.

"Willow, let your brother go before your mother has heart failure," a deep male voice boomed from the doorway.

Dayton reluctantly released his little sister as he turned his gaze to meet his father's. The happy smile gracing the older man's face was more than he could have hoped for. His greedy gaze took note of the wisps of new silver threading through his blond hair, the small lines of strain that had started to show on his father's still youthful face.

There were those small signs of aging but apart from that Iain Alexander was still the strong, dominant male that Dayton remembered from his youth. His father had always been firm but fair with his children. He'd instilled in them all a deep sense of pack and loyalty and he had always been quick to laugh with his offspring.

His eyes flitted to the tall blonde woman framed in the doorway at his father's side and he swallowed hard feeling so overcome with emotion as he met his mother's gaze.

Pale blue eyes shone with tears as Charlotte Alexander stared at her second son, quickly cataloguing the changes which had occurred in her boy since the last time she'd seen him.

He looked older, a bit leaner than she'd like but the awful lost expression was gone from his deep blue eyes. He looked uncertain, afraid to approach and that caused the tears she'd been holding in to overflow.

"Dayton Alexander, I swear you'll be the death of me one of these days," she bit out gruffly. "I can't believe you doubted for one moment that we wouldn't welcome you home. I thought I'd taught you better than that!" Her words were haranguing but her voice trembled with emotion.WWw.(n)OveLWðrm.©ðM

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Dayton swallowed hard again, the lump in his throat wedging tighter as he hurried forward to wrap his arms around her, hanging on so tightly he was afraid he might accidentally hurt her. He felt his mother tremble against him and shame washed through his body.

"You taught me just right, Ma," he whispered fighting hard not to cry at the pain he'd subjected her to. "I'm so sorry. I didn't mean to hurt you."

Charlotte stroked her hands through Dayton's hair, drinking in his scent, holding her son close as if her life depended on it. She'd given up all hope of ever having her boy back. She'd been forced to content herself with knowing that at least he lived where others had died when losing their mates.

Now her baby was back and it didn't matter a damn that he was a grown man and a Beta. He would always be her boy no matter what. "I know, son," she whispered against his neck. "We all know that. Losing Faith was just unbearable for you. We understood that. We may have missed you while you were gone, Day, but you needed that space. I'm so goddamned proud of you for surviving, for holding on long enough that you could come back to us."

Iain rested his hand on his son's shoulder, his free hand running soothingly down his mate's back. "We both are, Dayton," he said quietly. "If it had taken you another fifty years to come home we'd still be just as proud that you had the strength to come through something as terrible as losing Faith."

Dayton stood in his parents' embrace, feeling the last of his regret die away under their unconditional love and support. He had lost fifty three years of his life with his family but he knew he had the future to look forward to and all because of the exquisite vampire who had brought him back to life.

"I want you to meet Freya," he said quietly, turning his head to look over his shoulder. His mate was standing with her serene mask in place, watching his homecoming silently. He had no idea what she was thinking or feeling because their mate bond was so still and calm, echoing her expression.

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