

Chained By The Alpha By Jessica Hall Chapter 31

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I catch my breath, my body responding to his touch in ways I can't control. His proximity, the heat of his body, the intensity of his gaze – it's overwhelming, intoxicating

He leans in closer, his breath warm against my ear. "With my hands, my tongue, I would trace every inch of you. You'd never be out of my sight, you'd be lucky if I let you out of my bed," he whispers, sending another shiver through me

"I'd make sure you are safe, cherished..."

His words are like a caress, wrapping around me, pulling me deeper into the spell he's weaving. I can feel myself getting lost in the moment, in the fantasy he's painting-a fantasy where I am adored, where I am the center of

someone's world

But then he ruins it, his voice turning teasing, almost taunting. "I certainly wouldn't abandon you while you were in a vulnerable state." his

face pulls away with a smirk on his face

"But by the smell of your arousal, I bet you want to find out exactly how I'd worship you, don't you?" His fingers trace lower, brushing just below the hem of the shirt, teasing the bare skin of my thighs. "I bet Deacon doesn't get the same reaction from you."

The spell breaks, and I step back, feeling a flush of embarrassment heat my face. His words, so intimate and raw, cut through me, reminding me of the reality of the situation

"I... You can't just say things like that," I stammer, trying to regain my composure. The mix of arousal and embarrassment leaves me feeling exposed, vulnerable

Zayn's expression shifts, a flicker of regret passing through his eyes before he masks it with a smirk. "Can't I?"

Turning away from him, I wrap my arms around myself, feeling a turmoil of emotions raging inside me. Zayn's words, his touch, have awakened something within me, something I can't quite understand. And as much as I want to explore it, I'm also terrified it may mean he has sired me

I can feel the heat rising in my cheeks, his words igniting a fire within me. It's a dangerous game we're playing, flirting with the line between jest and earnest

"You're just messing with me," I say, though my

voice lacks conviction as I peer at him over my shoulder

Zayn's smile fades, replaced by a look of sincerity. "I'm not, Cleo. You deserve better than Deacon. You deserve someone who sees your worth, who values you for who you are."

The sincerity in his voice catches me off guard

The thought of being valued, cherished even, is both alluring and terrifying

"Now go shower, I'll find you some clothes," he tells me

Alpha Zayn leaves the bathroom to fetch me some clothes, and I turn on the water, adjusting it to a warm, soothing temperature. As I step under the spray, the water cascades over me, and I close my eyes, letting it wash over my skin. The tension in my muscles begins to

loosen, but my mind refuses to quiet down

My mind a whirlpool of confusion and unbidden thoughts about Zayn and the things he just said. The way he had moved, his muscles rippling under his skin, had left an imprint in my mind, one that I found both unsettling and undeniably alluring. His presence seemed to linger in the room, a tangible force that I couldn't ignore

As I lather soap over my body, I find myself thinking about Zayn more, about the way his sweatpants had clung to him. It's a visual that's both provocative and intimate, and it sends a warm flush through my body

I shake my head, trying to dispel these thoughts

I shouldn't be thinking about him like this, not now, not with everything that's happened. But it's like a current I can't swim against, drawing

me in despite my best efforts to stay aloof

Rinsing my face, I open my eyes, and to my mortification, he walks back into the bathroom just as I am about to step out of the shower. His eyes never leaving mine, he begins stripping off his own clothes and I open the door to hop out when he cages me back inside the shower, forcing me to remain in with him

"Dude, you are getting far too comfortable with me!" I snap, my embarrassment morphing into irritation

He smirks and steps into the shower with me. I try to hop out, but he reaches for the soap behind me, effectively caging me in. I take a step back, bumping into the cold tiles, letting out a shriek. I lurch forward and slam into him in my haste to get away. His strong arms wrap around me, stopping me from falling. Now, I am flush against him, feeling the heat of his body

against mine and feeling my blood run to my face. I try to pull away, but he keeps a hold on me

“Only the other day, you were saying unshifted females shouldn’t be around unmated males?” I remind him, trying to sound confident despite my awkwardness. “I’m pretty sure you’re breaking your jail bait rule?”

He only smiles, tugging me even closer, making me gasp. “I figured that went out the window when I healed you last night,” he murmurs, his lips brushing against mine as he speaks. “With my tongue.” He lets out a soft purr, and this time, his tongue runs along my lips

Arousal floods me, and instinctively, I lean in towards him, only to realize what I am doing. I jerk away, but his grip on me remains strong

Embarrassment washes over me as he lifts his

hand, brushing his thumb over my cheek. That silly smile still dances on his face, clearly toying with me. His scent envelops me, intoxicating and entrancing me. Before I know it, I am leaning in again, our lips nearly touching as he speaks

“I’m definitely getting too comfortable around you, but are you uncomfortable because you want me closer or because you’re scared of what Daddy will think if he finds out?” he asks, a teasing glint in his eyes

“Shut up,” I spit, glaring at him, trying to regain some semblance of control over the situation

The truth is, I can’t deny the strange attraction I feel towards him. But that didn’t mean I was going to let him make fun of me for it

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My face burns with embarrassment and confusion, a rush of emotions coursing through me, and some I’m struggling to understand. It is maddening – this inexplicable attraction to him that seems to come out of nowhere. In frustration, I growl at him, “This is your fault because you’ve sired my wolf when you healed me!

His eyes sparkle with mischief as his smile grows even wider, the sharp points of his canines peeking out from behind his lips. He laughs, before releasing me from his grip. I glare at him, still feeling the heat in my cheeks

“You shouldn’t do that,” I warn him, trying to regain some control of my body. But instead of

taking me seriously, he turns away from me to wash himself. I glare at his back before my eyes and can’t help but follow the trail of water droplets running down his strong shoulders, along the curve of his muscular back, and finally to the swell of his ass. When he turns around, my gaze lands on his cock-long, veiny and thick. I gulp at the size of it

“Still think you wouldn’t have noticed if I slept with you?” he laughs, clearly enjoying my discomfort. As I lift my gaze to his face, I feel the heat in my cheeks intensify. All the blood in my body seems to be rushing there, making me feel lightheaded

“And she says she’s not a virgin; your blush says otherwise,” he teases, stepping closer and stepping under the water to rinse himself off

Feeling caught out and exposed, I stare at the wall, not knowing where else to look. Moments

later, he hops out of the shower, wrapping a towel around his waist. “I left you a towel on the basin,” he informs me, walking out of the bathroom

I stand there, the water still cascading down my body. My mind races with conflicting emotions

I can’t deny the fierce attraction that pulses between us, but I am also terrified of what it could mean. For me, for my pack, and for my relationship with my father if he finds out Zayn has sired my wolf before I even have a chance to meet her. The thought of my father finding out about this sends a shiver down my spine, one that has nothing to do with the cool air hitting my wet skin. If he truly has, this is bad, he’ll have influence over my wolf, influence over me

As I finish showering, I mull over Alpha Zayn’s words, trying to make sense of everything that happened last night, but I draw a blank, my memory completely gone

Hopping out, I wrap the towel around my body

My thoughts continue to swirl as I get dressed in the clothes he had left for me men’s clothes that are too big, but carry his intoxicating scent

As I step out of the bathroom, I try to regain my composure, preparing myself for whatever lay ahead

But even with the uncertainty and fear, part of me feels alive, electric. And inexplicably drawn to the puzzling Alpha who has so thoroughly turned my world upside down and is on the verge of getting me murdered by my father

Trying to explain one run in with the Alpha was bad enough. How the heck will I explain spending the night with him? My father must be raising the alarm as we speak. What if Deacon went to my house looking for me, or if Lydia

saw him take me, and told my father? Panic slivers through my veins at that thought

Stepping out of the bathroom, I find Zayn waiting for me. The scent of him clings to the fabric, simultaneously comforting and maddening. I know I should be furious with him for siring my wolf but I find I can't bring myself to hate him for it considering he did stop anything from possibly happening to me. But it's the only thing that explains the strange attraction I have toward the man

"Please tell me we aren't leaving your pack with me dressed like this?" I whine, tugging at the clothes once I am dressed. As I do, my pants fall down, prompting a shriek from me as I scramble to pull them back up. Zayn laughs, his eyes dancing with amusement as he reaches over to help me. He grabs the waistband, hoisting them up so high I can almost tuck my breasts in them,

I hiss when he gives me a wedgie, front and back. I glare at him, and he laughs but ties the drawstring again before stepping away, so I can try to pull his sweats from my crack. Great, now I have to walk around with a wedgie and cameltoe

"Come on," he chuckles, guiding me toward the door. Reluctantly, I follow him, unable to shake the feeling that I am walking straight into the wolf's den once home. We make our way through the grand hallways of his packhouse, eventually emerging outside, where my car is waiting?

"L had my brother bring it back for you," he tells me, gesturing toward the vehicle, another thing I have no memory of. He then leads me to his own car, opening the door for me. I hesitate for a moment before sliding into the plush leather seat. The interior of his car is sleek, with a

glossy black finish. It was the kind of car most people could only dream of owning – but for Zayn, it was just another luxury in his life, while it gives me anxiety in case I break something, or scuff it with my shoes

Zayn hops in and puts the key in the ignition

"You aren't taking me into the city, are you?" I ask nervously as he starts the car. "My father will murder me if he catches me with you."

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“Relax, Cleo,” he replies, a wicked grin playing on his lips. “I have no intention of getting you in trouble with your father.” He revs the engine, sending a shiver down my spine as I fumble for the seatbelt

As we drive, I can’t help but feel torn with the information of Deacon abandoning me and the knowledge that being involved with Zayn could have dire consequences. He is powerful, intoxicating different from Deacon in every conceivable way. I can’t help but remember what he said last night. That he would never be caught dancing with another woman if I was his

“Stop overthinking things,” he says suddenly, as

if reading my mind. “I’ll make sure nothing bad happens to you, your father won’t find you here.”

I want to believe him, more than anything. But deep down, I know that anything to do with Alpha Zayn is playing with fire – and I am dangerously close to getting burned

“My step-sister is always looking for any excuse to get me in trouble, and this wouldn’t just get me in trouble. My father would disown me,” I explain, feeling the heat rise in my cheeks as I think about Lydia’s constant meddling

“So?” he asks, his gray eyes meeting mine with a challenge. “You’re an adult, you can be around whoever you want,” Zayn shrugs and I raise an eyebrow. No, he can be around whoever he wants, he’s an Alpha. Right now, I am just the

Alpha’s daughter who relies on her father to still pay her tuition

“My father hates you for some reason, he blames you for killing his best friend, but I am yet to

hear word of this so called friend he had.” I admit

“Ah, he’s talking about my father,” Zayn states

Confusion washes over me and Zayn smirks, his fingers tapping against the steering wheel

“That’s your real concern, your father.”

I swallow hard, averting my gaze. I can’t deny the truth of his words

“Relax, Cleo,” Zayn murmurs, his hand reaching over to brush against mine, sending an electric thrill up my arm. “I promise I won’t let anything happen to you.”

"Easy for you to say," I mutter under my breath, but the warmth of his touch somehow eases my fears. I pull my hand away, he clears his throat, placing both hands on the steering wheel

"Because of my father," he abruptly answers, catching me off guard. I look at him, confusion mixing with curiosity

"Excuse me?" I ask

"They used to be best friends and they were talking again before my father died. Your father, he hates me because my father is dead, he blames me. My father was going to sell him back the land but I stopped him not wanting Linda to get her hands on it. When the city was founded, your father and mine, along with four other men, co- owned the land on which it was built. However, your father got into debt to mine, and after he was caught out, he spent the

funds put aside for his half. My father was going to file for bankruptcy when your mother told my father to sell half of it."

"So he was forced to sell half of their shared half or lose it all. He left a patch for your father from his half, which he finished paying off just before you were born, but back then my father had no choice but to sell the rest off. It took until I took over my father's pack to recover

what he lost," he explains

"And as a result, your father has been holding a grudge against my father ever since, and he's been trying to find a way to take the land back

That's why he hates me he thinks my father sold him out and tried to steal what is his

However, that hatred grew when my father died, your father hated him but for years they were really close."

"But if my father were in debt, he wouldn't have had a choice," I say, the pieces not quite fitting together in my mind

"True, but your father didn't see it that way and reckons my father caused issues in his marriage to your mother. However, what he doesn't know is that your mother told my father to sell it because the money used to buy it originally came from her parents." My brows furrow, my grandparents died when I was six, so hearing him speak of them is a little odd?

“Only when your mother learned your father spent the land taxes and defaulted on her parents’ credit. So she asked my father to sell it to get back anything he could for it. My father, luckily, was able to sell a sizable chunk that paid her parents back. But he kept a piece and gave it to your mother because your mother used to be best friends with mine until your father got

it in his head that my father was meddling and after his wife.”

“Yet he left her for the troll he has now because she is his mate,” I scoff, shaking my head at the absurdity of it all. Zayn remains silent on the matter, clearly uncomfortable

with discussing

my father’s choices

“So, where is your mother now?” I ask him, trying to shift the conversation

“Dead. She died 19 years ago,” Zayn reveals, swallowing thickly as if the words still sting after all these years

“So, just after I was born?” Realization dawns; I never heard of this or met him before the Alpha meeting. If our mothers were close, surely I would have known him if she did not die

I stare at Zayn, trying to wrap my head around the revelation he’s just laid before me. My father’s long-standing grudge against him wasn’t because of some imagined slight or personal vendetta it was rooted in a complicated history between our families and that sense of betrayal that has festered over the years

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“Wow,” I murmur, feeling a mix of emotions churning inside me

“That’s... quite a story.” The weight of his words settles on my chest, making my heart feel heavy with the knowledge of their shared past. I glance at Zayn, taking in the determined set of his jaw and the shadows in his eyes

As we pull up next to a quaint café and boutique clothing store, Zayn climbs out of the car and gestures for me to follow him. I hesitantly move around to head into the café, feeling foolish in the oversized clothes he lent me, when he suddenly grabs my hand and tugs me in the direction of the boutique instead. He pushes the door open with a jingle from the bell

above, revealing an array of colorful summer outfits on display

“Andrea!” Zayn calls out, his voice echoing through the small store. A woman around my father’s age appears, her face lighting up with Joy upon seeing Zayn. She rushes forward and embraces him tightly, her eyes sparkling with affection

“Oh, I’ve missed you! I haven’t seen you in weeks! How’s your brother?”

“Doing much better, picked him up last week,” Zayn replies, his voice softening

“Who is this lovely young lady?” Andrea asks, her gaze shifting to me. Her expression is warm and welcoming

“This is…” Zayn begins, but Andrea interrupts him

“Gosh, you look like your mother,” says the woman, her eyes lighting up. “Hello Cleo, I’m Andrea, Zayn’s mother’s twin sister,” she tells me

“You knew my mother too?” I asked, always eager to meet someone who knew her. Back home, hardly anyone mentions her and when I do, I always get told not to bring up the past, or not to upset Linda by speaking of his previous marriage

“Of course, honey. Your mother and I were close friends,” Andrea says warmly, her gaze softening as she looks at me

I swallow hard, trying to keep my emotions in check. No one has ever spoken so openly about my mother before, and it feels both thrilling and

forbidden. Last time I heard anyone speak of her I was eleven years old, but then Linda got upset, rarely does anyone mention her now

“Yes, very well. I was devastated to learn she passed, many regrets. I should have intervened earlier, I did warn her, but…” Andrea’s voice trails off under Zayn’s disapproving gaze, changing the topic swiftly

“Take it you need clothes,” she laughs, switching subjects with skill and pulling clothes from the shelves. I glance at Zayn, wanting to know what she was going to say, when he nods for me to follow her

“Really? You already gave me a phone, showered me, healed me, and now you’re clothing me?” I am baffled by his generosity

He chuckles. “At this rate, you might as well

move in with me,” he mocks, then laughs but nudges me to follow his aunt

I comply, and Andrea hands me a long, flowy dress. I avoid looking at the price tag and glance at Zayn for reassurance

“Go on, this place was my mother’s. Pick what you want,” he shrugs, and the ease of his

generosity battles me, especially since I am from a rival pack. Why is he being so nice?

I slip into the fitting room and change into the dress, admiring how it hugs my curves yet finally feeling better in clothes. I don’t have to worry about them falling down to my ankles when I am walking

“Looks like you’re ready for breakfast,” Andrea says, her eyes twinkling with approval as she takes in my appearance. “Go on, Zayn’s waiting for you at the café next door.”

Heading next door into the cafe, I spot Zayn seated at the back of the cafe. When we arrived at the boutique store, this place had been bustling with people. Yet I find we’re the only ones here now. I peer around wondering if I drove them off being that I am not from here

Zayn notices me, sets his phone down and rises from his seat coming over to me

“You found something you like?” he asks, eyeing me up and down with approval. I nod, still peering around at all the empty tables

“Yes, thank you,” I tell him and he places a hand on my lower back. “Where did everyone go?” I ask as he leads me toward the table he was sitting at

“Patrols, home, we have the place to ourselves

besides the staff.”

My eyes narrow at him. “I scared them off didn’t I? They don’t like rival packs around,”

I frown feeling terrible when Zayn pulls out my chair. I reluctantly sit in it

“I would hardly call you a threat to my pack,” he chuckles

“I never said a threat, just that I’m not from here and it’s obvious,” I tell him

Zayn grips my shoulders, making me look up at him, only to find his face barely an inch off mine

His lips are so close, my eyes dart to them and his scent floods me, making me instinctively lean in

"L asked them to leave, you didn't scare them off," he whispers. My face heats at his words

"You didn't have to do that," I blurt, horrified

"Your pack doesn't bother me, this is their territory," I tell him and he smirks

"You were worried about people seeing you, I asked them to leave, stop stressing besides most had duties to attend anyway." He squeezes my shoulders before sitting down across from me

"You don't like being alone with me," he chuckles

"It's not that I'm just worried about being seen with you," I admit

"Here? Your father wouldn't dare, besides my pack won't snitch on you," he adds. I chew my lip

"They may not, but I know Deacon would have stopped by home looking for me by now, which in turn will have my father questioning my whereabouts."

"You seriously like that little weasel?" he questions, his eyes narrowing

"Well, he is my boyfriend," I admit. Zayn leans back with his arms folded across his chest, eyeing me

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"But he's not your mate?" he questions. I shake my head. Deacon already admitted that I'm not his mate, he is two years older than me and has his wolf

"No, that I do know, his wolf hates me because Deacon wants to mark me when I come of age."

"His wolf wants his mate?"

I shrug unsure, I tend to try not to be around him when his wolf is loose

"You're scared of his wolf?" he presses

"Can we talk about something else?" I ask, not feeling this conversation is appropriate

"Does mine scare you?" he asks

"Yours hasn't bitten me," I tell him. "Though he is huge, his aura is potent, but no, your wolf doesn't scare me, well he did when you shifted but not after falling asleep with him," I chuckle

"Deacon's wolf bit you?"

I nod when a lady brings out a milkshake. I thank her, then reach for my milkshake. The coldness of it soothes my dry throat as I take a

sip

"Yes, he lost control a couple years ago and shifted when we had an argument. He tore into me," I admit

"That's why you have the scar on your hip, the one you covered with your tattoo?" he questions. I nod my head

"What about your tattoos, you have a heap?" I ask, trying to push his attention away from my relationship with Deacon. My eyes roam over his arms that are covered in them to his chest, I can just make out the edges of them poking out beneath his shirt

"Pack emblem," he says, patting one side of his chest. Though I did notice the other side was left bare. "My arms?" he shrugs. "My father had

the same ones, I got them for him." My brows furrow in confusion

"I thought you hated your father?" I ask, my eyes widen at my words and I cover my mouth before quickly apologizing. "Sorry, that's none of my business."

"What made you think that?" he asks curiously

"No reason," I shake my head, not wanting to

answer. He raises an eyebrow at me

"Then why would you assume?" he chuckles. I sigh heavily knowing he won't drop it now

"Rumors, everyone says you killed him,"

"T did, but I don't hate him. I loved my father, he was a good Dad, husband and Alpha," he tells me. Now that just confuses me more

"He changed the last couple of years

Werewolves do that when they lose their mates, he was unstable," is all he offers in the way of an answer

The woman returns with our food, and I glance down to see what Zayn had ordered and sigh in relief thinking for sure it would be salad or something

"You look shocked," he laughs as I pick up a fry!

"Yeah, most people assume since I'm a girl I like salad. I think Deacon forgets I'm werewolf not a rabbit," I chuckle

"Why do you let him order for you if you don't like what he orders?"

Great back to Deacon again we go

I shrug, "I think he finds it intimidating that I'm Alpha born and he is a regular wolf. He said he liked ordering for me, like he has control over something, I think... I don't know. I just allowed him too, if it meant it made him feel better," I say, shrugging and putting another fry in my mouth

"He should be intimidated, you're an Alpha

And you shouldn't have to sacrifice your nature

just because he is uncomfortable." "You ordered for me!" I point out

"Because you weren't here, and I know you're eager to get home, besides I am not much of a salad eater, so I just ordered what I normally do

Besides, I don't think I've met anyone who

doesn't like burgers and fries," he laughs

He does have a point. "Next time you can order for both of us, I don't feel intimidated by you," he smirks

"Because you're an Alpha," I point out. He shrugs

“Even if I weren’t, I still wouldn’t be intimidated by you. Deacon should have realized that, if he is so insecure around you, he doesn’t deserve you, he shouldn’t want to intimidate you, that’s

not how relationships work. Couples shouldn’t want to dominate each other; they’re meant to be a partnership, not a boxing match,” he tells me

“How can you say that? You’re Alpha. I know it’s hard to walk away when challenged, you couldn’t when my father challenged you,” I remind him

“I did, though, didn’t I? I didn’t want to, but I did for you.”

“So you’re saying your wolf doesn’t want to challenge me knowing another Alpha is sitting across from him?” I laugh

“Oh, he does, but that doesn’t mean he will, also doesn’t mean in the same way you think he does,” he snickers, taking a bite of his burger

“What do you mean?” I ask

“You really have to ask?” he laughs harder. “I’m still a man, Cleo and you look like sin in that dress.” he tells me. I glance down at what I’m wearing with my boobs on display.

My face heats

“So you’re saying if I challenged your wolf he

wouldn’t try to kill me?” I probe

“You’re a female Alpha, and I don’t mean that in a bad way. Just saying my wolf is

huge, he doesn’t find many people a threat. Honestly, if you actually challenged him he’d probably roll over for you,” he states. I look for any deception on his face but

don’t find any

“Then something is wrong with your wolf, he

should hate me since I’m an Alpha.”

“You have no wolf, ask me again when you have her,” he tells me

“Maybe I’ll challenge you.”

“Or maybe you’ll roll over and submit? I guess we’ll have to find out,” he smiles

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"You seem so sure of yourself," I taunt

"Maybe I am just hoping you will be easier to deal with regarding your border issues. If you are more compliant, I already fight with your father enough." he states

"Wait, you'll handle the borders?" I ask him. He leans back in his chair, watching me for a second

He seems deep in thought. "Your father will eventually find out. You're aware of that, right?" he tells me. I nod slowly, but my father is being irrational. He's putting the entire pack at risk

I sigh heavily. "You're scared of him," Zyan

asks, and my eyes dart to his

"Not in that sense, not how you're probably thinking. My father won't hurt me," he raises an eyebrow at me, his eyes darting to my cheek, almost like he can see my father's handprint there. Instinctively, my hand goes to my cheek and my face flames

"Are you sure about that?" he asks and I swallow guiltily

"I know he hit you. I could see the burst blood vessels under your skin, Cleo, when I showered you last night and washed your makeup off."

"He was angry because I came to you for help. I overstepped." he nods slowly and leans forward in his chair

"That doesn't give him the right to put his hands

on you," he adds

"It's not like," he raises an eyebrow at me and I exhale, knowing there is no point. He hates my father. Nothing I say to him will justify his actions

"He apologized, he lost his temper. He isn't usually violent, he's never hit me before," I admit. His jaw clenches

"If you're not afraid of him hurting you, then what are you scared of?"

"I'm scared of him giving my mother's pack to Lydia," I tell him

He nods. "And I'm scared of him marrying me off to Boyd."

"That won't happen," he tells me. I laugh. He

has no idea

"It won't happen, Cleo," he tells me and his aura rushes out and I fight the urge to push back against it, knowing there is no point challenging the man when I don't have my wolf. Gritting my teeth, I stare down at my plate when he suddenly drops his aura

"I speak to Alpha Dane. I have a meeting with him next week, anyway." I look up at him hopeful. If I can't get Boyd to refuse the marriage alliance, maybe Zyan can convince Alpha Dane not to force it

"Why would you do that?" I ask. This man has already done enough for me

"Because no one should be forced into a marriage for treaty agreements," he tells me

"Now finish eating, you should head back before

your father sends out a search party looking for

you,

"That's if he hasn't already." I roll my eyes and he snickers

"I'm sure he has. He's probably tearing the city apart as we speak, looking for you. Have you decided how you're going to explain your absence?" I shake my head and he clicks his tongue

"Well, you wanna think of something quick," I nod, mulling his words over, but either way I know I'll end up having to come clean

eventually. Occasionally, it's best to just rip the band-aid off

"I guess I'll tell him I fell asleep in my car," I ponder

"He'll believe that?"

"No, but it will give me a few days to come up with a better excuse or I can tell him I stayed at Deacon's, which will definitely not go down well, but Deacon will cover for me."

Zyan says nothing and we finish eating in silence. When it's time to leave, he drives me back to his place where my car is waiting and hands me my car keys, along with another key and a plastic card. My brows furrow as I look at the swipe key and the

small key attached to it

“What’s this?” I ask him

“That is the swipe card to the gate in here, and the key is to the packhouse,” he tells me. My eyes widen, and I try to pass it back to him

“Zayn, I can’t take that,” I tell him

“You can, and you

will if you

want my men watching your borders,” he tells me, and I

swallow guiltily

“You still haven’t said what you want me to do

I can’t pay you. My father would notice if I took money, besides I don’t even know what he pays for pack protection,” I admit

“When do you go back to school?” he asks and I lean against the hood of

my car

“Next week,” I admit, and I can’t wait to be away from my father, Linda, and Lydia

“And what do you do for work?” he asks

“Mostly I work for my father, but only during breaks mostly. I was paying off this after Lydia almost rode it off, but after my fight with him, I think I’ll steer clear of him.

Especially if he is

serious about this marriage alliance. I know he’ll try to force me to drop out.”

“He can’t do that,” he tells me

“He can when he pays for it,” I chuckle nervously

Zayn sighs, then runs his fingers through his hair. “Fine,” he says, stepping closer and

placing his hands on either side of my hips. His scent overwhelms me and he smirks, seeing the effect he has on me. “You’ve sired my wolf, you know that. My father is going to murder me,” I growl, but it comes out more of a moan. My eyes widen and

my face heats

“Keep telling yourself that,” he purrs, giving me a devious smile

“Zayn, stop playing with me. It’s not funny!” I

growl at him. But the shaky note in my voice betrays how hot and flustered this man

makes me feel. His gaze rakes over me and ignites a pool of desire that has been simmering deep within the entire time I’ve been with him. I try to remind myself it’s the sire bond from him healing me, yet another part of me can’t deny how attracted to

the man I am

“And what if I don’t want to stop?” His voice is low, barely more than a whisper as he dips his head lower, his lips moving against my ear. It sends a thrill of anticipation spiraling down to my toes

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The way he looks at me... It says he wants more than just playful banter. He wants me. I don’t know if that is his way of getting back at my father, but I can’t say I would turn him down if he requested my body for payment. Which goes against everything I believe in. I am saving myself for my mate or for Deacon to mark me, yet why do I feel like I would throw all that away for him?

Deacon! Deacon! You have a boyfriend; I remind myself

Zayn’s arms suddenly wrap around my waist, pulling me flush against him. My breath hitches as I feel the hard contours of his body pressing into mine. The feeling of raw power emanating

from him makes my blood pulse wildly in my veins, filling me with a heady mix of lust and desire. It’s intoxicating

“T bet right now, I could ask you to do anything, and you’d fall over yourself to do it,” he laughs softly, pulling away to look at my face

“It’s the sire. If you didn’t want me falling over myself to please you, you shouldn’t have healed me!” I blurt. He smiles wickedly

“Or maybe I have you exactly where I want you,” he purrs, and my eyes flutter closed at the sound emanating from his chest. Zayn’s words send a shiver down my spine, and I can’t deny the pull he has over me. I know it’s the sire bond, but part of me wants to believe that there’s something more between us

DEACON! I remind myself. Yet he ditched me,
abandoned me in a vulnerable state!

I push Zayn away, trying to regain some control over myself. "We both know this is just the sire bond," I say firmly, my voice shaking slightly

He raises an eyebrow at me and smirks. "Ts it? Because I have a feeling you're attracted to me regardless of the sire bond." He takes a step closer, trapping me against the wall with his body and my car once more

I can feel his breath on my face and it takes all of my willpower not to give in to him. "I have a boyfriend," I remind him, hoping that will be enough to get through to him

He leans in even closer, his lips almost touching mine. "And yet here you are, alone with me, and youre really putting up a fight to escape me," he whispers seductively

I struggle to find a response as his hand gently cups my cheek. My heart is racing and my body is betraying me by responding to his touch

Tension crackles like electricity between us. The raw power of his aura radiating from him makes my blood rush, my heart pound against the walls of my chest. It's almost as if he's wrapped me up in this heady mix of lust and desire, and I suddenly don't want to break free of it

Zayn's lips brush against mine as he speaks

"What if I said I want you as payment? Would deny me?" his words sending a shiver down my spine. I know I should push him away, remind him I have a boyfriend and this is wrong, but all rational thought seems to have escaped me in this moment

He pulls back slightly, his eyes searching mine for any sign of hesitation. But all he sees is the desire burning in them, mirroring his own

"Zyan, please," I tell him. A part of me wonders if am begging him to keep going or asking him to stop

I bite my lip, trying to regain some control over my body and emotions. "This is wrong," I whisper

"Is it really?" Zayn asks, his hand trailing down from my cheek to lightly brush against my neck

"You don't seem to be complaining." he smiles smugly then leans in closer until his hot breath tickles my earlobe, causing waves of anticipation to sear through me

“But you should go before I don’t let you, wouldn’t want that boyfriend of yours to find out you’re sired to another now would we?” he asks and hearing him speak Deacon’s name is like he tossed a bucket of ice water over me

The thought of Deacon makes me stumble back momentarily, but Zayn’s swift reaction leaves no room for escape. Strong arms circle around my waist, pulling me close again. The feel of his hard body pressing against mine again causes a sharp intake of breath

He watches me for a second and I push off his chest. “I should go.” I tell him while also reminding myself how wrong this is. Zayn lets me go and I fumble with my keys to unlock the car when I pause

“You never said how I am supposed to pay you for watching the borders.” I remind him as I climb into my car

“[have an office near your university. What days do you have free?” he asks

“None, but I have three early days,” I tell him

“Then you’ll come there. You can help me in the office. I just fired my last secretary,” he tells me

“Why?” I find myself asking

“Because she is my ex,” he states. My brows pinch

“Oh, the one you dumped via text?” I snort a laugh

“Yep, don’t need her moping around work,” he chuckles

“Who said she is moping? Maybe she is glad to

be done with your arrogant ass,” I tell him and he smiles

“Now I’m arrogant. Only a second ago you would have let me kiss you,” he tells me, and my face heats at his words. I open my mouth to

argue it’s the sire bond, but he beats me to it

“Yeah, yeah, it’s the sire bond. Now get home

You have my number if you need me, and I’ll have my men watch your borders from a

distance,” he tells me before turning on his heel and heading back into the packhouse. Shaking my head, I start up my car and turn it around in the huge driveway before leaving, driving out his territory

Now, to convince my father, I slept in the car or at Deacon’s because guaranteed he’s been looking for me and will be on a warpath

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After leaving the café, and Zayn, I feel a mix of emotions swirling within me. The quiet comfort of his presence I found calming, but is now replaced by the cold, uncertain air of the city as I make my way home. My mind is a whirlpool of thoughts about Zayn, Deacon, the pack, the issue with rogue attacks and the complicated web I have found myself in. And then there’s the issue of explaining my absence to

my father

Either way he’ll find out, it’s just a matter of how long I can avoid his wrath for

When I finally pull up into the driveway, I breathe a sigh of relief as I notice my father and stepmother’s absence as both their cars are gone

However, the sight of Lydia’s car elicits an involuntary groan and a roll of my eyes knowing

she may just be worse than them together

Steeling myself, I step out of the car and head towards the front door

“About time you showed up,” Lydia snipes as soon as I step inside, her voice dripping with disdain. “Are they new clothes?” She asks, becoming distracted by my appearance. “What brand is that?” She asks, pulling to see the tag. I shove her away

She eyes me suspiciously. “Morning Lydia, nice to see you too,” I mutter and she folds her arms across her chest. I drop my keys on the counter ignoring her

“Where were you all night?” She questions

“None of your business,” I retort, trying to hide my unease as I shrug off my jacket. Her gaze lingers on me, her lips pursed in disapproval

She eyes my clothes and I know she is wondering where I got them from

“Really?” she presses, stepping closer, her eyes narrowing. “You were seen last night talking with Alpha Zayn at the club. You wouldn’t have been with the oh-so-dark and mysterious Alpha, would you? You know Deacon wouldn’t approve.”

“Lydia, don’t start,” I warn, feeling my cheeks heat up despite my best efforts to keep them calm yet thinking of Zayn makes me all hot and flustered and I know it’s the sire bond, I can’t believe he sired my wolf. Well I’m pretty sure he did, I wasn’t this overwhelmed by him when I first met him. “Deacon and I are adults, we don’t need your input on our relationship.”

“Relationship?” She smirks, her eyes gleaming with malice. “Is that what you’re calling it now?”

You don’t deserve Deacon, not with how you were throwing yourself at that alpha last night.”

“I was not throwing myself at him, and since when are you the expert on relationships, what’s your longest relationship? A week?” I ask her, and she glares at me

“Can you just go away, Lydia? I really don’t have time for your games today,” I snap, my patience wearing thin. But she doesn’t move; instead, she takes another step closer

Yet now, as I truly take in her appearance, my senses are immediately assaulted by the pungent scent of Lydia’s anxiety. Her eyes are wide with worry, bloodshot from crying, and her hands wring together nervously. She looks a mess, but there’s something undeniably satisfying about her vulnerability

“Lydia,” I say, trying to keep my voice steady as I take in her disheveled appearance. “What’s going on?”

Lydia sighs heavily and rubs her eyes. “Your father won’t listen, nor does he care, I.....” She pauses and sucks in a breath

“Have you seen Deacon? He didn’t show up for patrol this morning, and his Alpha said he tried to mindlink him but found his tether broken,” she stammers, her voice quivering with concern

“His pack tether?” I ask, feeling a cold shiver run down my spine at the thought. There are only two ways to sever a pack link: go rogue, either by choice or by force, and death. My heart races at the possibility that Deacon might be in danger

“He’s probably wrong, Deacon is probably

passed out drunk somewhere, and it numbed his link to his Alpha,” I tell her. But something nags at me, and I pull my phone out of my pocket

Usually, Deacon visits me every day, it’s rare that I don’t see or hear from him

I try calling Deacon's number, but it goes straight to voicemail. A sense of unease tightens in my stomach. Lydia's worry seems to deepen, her eyes glistening with unshed tears. "This isn't like him, he always reports in," she murmurs

"And why would his Alpha say it's broken, he has no reason to go rogue, or what if he had an accident on his way home or what...?" Lydia is rambling, and I've never seen her this worried about anyone before

I try to calm her, placing a hand on her shoulder. "Hey, calm down, he's probably fine,"

I say, trying to catch her gaze

"We'll find him, okay? But we need to stay calm and think rationally."

"Rationally?" she scoffs, wiping away a tear with the back of her hand. "How can I be rational when Deacon could be...could be..." She chokes on her words, unable to finish

the sentence

"Why are you so worried about Deacon?" I ask, suspicion creeping into my voice. "He's my boyfriend, not yours."

Lydia shifts uncomfortably, avoiding my gaze

"We should all be concerned, shouldn't we?" she deflects, but her heightened anxiety is obvious. She's always had a thing for Deacon

"We'll check his house, he is probably hungover, or maybe he has passed out," I

suggest, more to ease her worry than to appease

my Own growing concern

"Have you tried calling any of his friends?" I ask, breaking the silence

"Of course I have!" she snaps, her frustration evident. "They haven't heard from him either."

"Alright, alright," I say, placating her. "I'm just trying to help."

"Maybe he went somewhere else after leaving the club," I suggest, mixed emotions swirling within me. Worry about Deacon's well-being churns with the lingering memory of his betrayal, and him ditching me in such a vulnerable state last night

"Or maybe he didn't make it home," Lydia suggests, her voice low and desperate, as if she's afraid to speak the words aloud

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"Let's not jump to conclusions," I chide gently

"We need more information before we can form any theories."

"Right," she agrees, taking a deep breath to steady herself

"Let's check his place. Maybe he has just passed out," I suggest. However, the uncertainty is eating away at me, but I refuse to let fear consume me

"Fine, let's go," Lydia nods frantically and starts pushing me toward the door

As we walk outside to my car, I can't help but wonder what's gotten into her lately. I know she's always had a thing for Deacon, but this

sudden surge of concern seems... intense

"Where are my father and Linda?" I ask as we

make our way to the car. She looks at me briefly before answering, "He went to speak with Alpha Samuel, they're discussing some pack business."

"Pack business? What kind of pack business?" I press, feeling uneasy. Something tells me there's more to it than that

"Something about alliances; who cares, Deacon is missing," she snaps, ripping my car door open. I pause in the driveway, a shudder running up my spine. Alliances with Alpha Dane... My father wouldn't agree to a marriage alliance without my consent, would he?

Shaking the thought from my head, I open the car door. "Cleo, hurry up. Who cares where they are! It's nothing for you to worry about," she

dismisses my question with a wave. "Let's just focus on finding Deacon right now."

"Fine," I sigh, knowing it's pointless arguing with her. We get in the car and drive in silence, each of us lost in our own thoughts. I can feel the tension between us, thick and palpable, like a fog that refuses to lift

As we drive, my mind races with possibilities, my fingers tapping impatiently on the steering wheel, and I can't help but sneak glances at Lydia. She's always been so composed, so calculating in her moves. But now? She is a storm of emotions, barely

contained beneath the surface. I'd known for years that she had feelings for Deacon, but it still stings to see her so invested in his well-being

"Did Deacon say anything to you about where he was going last night?" I inquire, hoping to

get any information I can from her regarding Deacon's whereabouts

She turns in her seat to look at me

"Why don't you know where he is, Cleo? Weren't you with him last night?"

I'm taken aback by her abrupt shift from worry to anger. "No, Lydia, I wasn't with Deacon

Deacon ditched me! What's going on with you?"

"Ditched you? I saw him leave with you!" she snarls, and confusion washes over me. What does she even mean by that? She's delusional

Her face contorts in anger. "Then where were you, I saw him leave with you? And why can't we find him?"

"I'm not arguing over Deacon with you, it's none

of your business where I was," I growl at her and Lydia mutters something under her breath

As her accusations hang in the air, I start to piece things together. Lydia's overreaction, her intense worry – it's more personal than it should be. She's hiding something, but I can't dwell on that now. Deacon is missing, and that's what matters

Pulling into Deacon's street Lydia's agitation seems to grow with each passing second. Lydia's clenched jaw and furrowed brow, her tapping fingers and restless movements, all, contribute to the image of a person on the brink of panic

Her eyes scan the familiar street, searching for any sign of Deacon

We stop out the front of his house, but his car is not here, which makes worry gnaw at me further. I run my fingers through my hair, trying

to remain calm

We step out of the car and approach the front door, my heart pounding in my chest

Lydia reaches out to ring the doorbell, her hand trembling slightly. I can see the fear in her eyes, the desperation to find any trace of Deacon. The seconds stretch into eternity as we wait for someone to answer the door, but there's no response

We exchange a nervous glance before Lydia takes a step back, peering through the windows in search of any signs of life inside. The curtains are drawn shut, so we are unable to see anything beyond them

We are about to leave when I suddenly remember the spare key that he always kept outside. "The spare key," I blurt out. "Deacon

always keeps a spare key under the doormat."

Without wasting another moment, I rush over and lift up the doormat, revealing the

small silver key hidden beneath, letting out a breath of relief. I glance at Lydia, who waves her hands at me before shoving me out of the way, she snatches the key and jams it in the lock

The door creaks open, revealing a dimly lit hallway, and all the lights are off

The house is silent, and a chill runs down my spine as we step cautiously inside. It's as

if time has stopped, the air heavy with anticipation. We make our way through the familiar rooms, searching for any clue that might lead us to Deacon

Lydia's footsteps echo behind me, her breathing shallow and uneven. I can sense her desperation

growing with each passing second, matching my own mounting fear. The house feels empty, void of any signs of life. Where is he?

We both move from room to room, meeting back in the foyer. "Maybe he stayed with friends, his car isn't even here," I tell her, yet the sinking feeling in my stomach causes knots of anxiety

"Or maybe he didn't make it home at all. Maybe he is dead in a ditch somewhere," she retorts, her eyes narrowing suspiciously. "Maybe you're the one who's lying, Cleo. Did you do something to him?"

"What would I lie about? And why would I do something to MY boyfriend Lydia, just shut up, you aren't making any sense!" I snarl incredulously, feeling my anger rise at her

accusation

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"Where were you Cleo, I saw Deacon leave with you! Don't lie to me, I know you're lying!"

"Are you really going down this road right now, I told you I never left with him? Is that so hard to believe?" I ask, my disbelief growing by the second

"I saw you!" she screams, her face turning purple in her anger as she clenches her fists glaring at me

"Fine," I snap, my patience wearing thin. I can't deal with this anymore, now isn't the time for it

"No, I wasn't with Deacon last night. I was with someone else."

My words seem to shock her, she flicks her long

hair over her shoulder and crosses her arms

"Who?" she presses, her interest piqued

"None of your business!" I shoot back, refusing to give her any more ammunition against me

She opens her mouth to speak again, but I cut her off

"Lydia, I swear," I start to explain, my voice shaking with emotion. "He left me at the club; I don't know where he went after that. Last time I remember seeing him, he was dancing with you and Maya!"

"Of course you don't remember how convenient

I don't believe it," she snaps, rolling her eyes

My gaze flickers over her body, taking in her disheveled appearance the smeared makeup, tousled hair and rumpled clothes. Her gaze goes to me. She sneers, eyeing my clothes suspiciously

"But clearly you were up to no good, look at what you're wearing. Where did you get money for that dress, are you whoring yourself out now?"

"I'm not doing this with you, think what you want," I wave her off dismissively. She really grates on my every nerve

"But you managed to find your way into someone else's arms, didn't you? I wonder what Deacon will think about that. You're nothing but a slut, who else are you screwing?"

Does Deacon know what a whore you are?" She keeps pushing, her words laced with malice and accusation

"Wha?" I stammer, caught off guard by her accusation. But it isn't entirely baseless. Last night, in my drunken haze, I had ended up entangled with Zayn, but not in the way she
1s

suggesting

"Lydia, it wasn't like that," I say defensively, my fingers twisting nervously in the fabric of my dress. "Let's just inform my dad and organize a search," I say, trying to keep the quiver out of my voice. My mind races, attempting to focus on the task at hand: finding Deacon

"Fine," she begrudgingly agrees, her eyes narrowing with suspicion. "But you still haven't answered my question, Cleo. If you weren't with Deacon, where were you staying last night? Or should I say, who with?"

I feel my cheeks heat up, knowing full well that no answer will be good enough for Lydia. But there's no escaping this conversation now

Taking a deep breath, I muster all my courage and admit, "I stayed with Zayn." She stops beside my car staring at me

Nervousness creeps into me, fuck I am so busted. My father is going to kill me

"I tried to drive home and Zayn ran into me," I tell her truthfully, and she scoffs

"You were with Zayn? As in, you spent the night with him?" she asks, shocked

"Zayn found me outside the club, alone and wasted, trying to drive home. He helped me back to his place, Deacon was not with me."

"Wait, so you were gallivanting around with a rival pack alpha the same night Deacon goes missing, and I am supposed to believe that is a coincidence!?"

"Lydia, I don't care what you believe, just get in the car so we can find him. We've wasted enough time." She huffs but does as she is told,

and then throws another accusation my way

"Do you think your new boyfriend, Zayn, had something to do with Deacon's disappearance? He doesn't like him," Lydia points out, pursing her lips as she cocks a brow as if I would know the answer to that, after spending a little time with Zayn

I feel a surge of anger at her suggestion. "Zayn wouldn't hurt Deacon," I snap back. "He has no reason to. Besides, he is probably fine, you'll see all this worry will be for nothing."

"But you were with Zayn last night, weren't you?"

you? she presses, her eyes narrowed in suspicion

"Yes, and I think I would have known if Deacon was with me! He wasn't!" I snap back at her, and she falls back in her chair, folding her arms

across her chest. Yet, my mind goes back to what Zayn said about how he saved me, but never said from whom. I shake the thought away, Deacon would never. Right? But the thought has been embedded into my mind, and for some reason I can't shake it off as we continue the drive home

Once home, Lydia rushes inside and I see my father is now home. I am dreading going inside now, I know Lydia will blurt to my father about me being with Zayn, and I can already see the fight this will cause

Once Lydia is inside, I pull out my phone and send a message to Zayn. My fingers hesitate for a moment before I type

Me: 'Deacon is missing. Can you check the club's footage from last night? Maybe it can help us find out where he went.'

I hit send, feeling a mixture of hope and desperation. Zayn might be my only chance at finding out what happened to Deacon. As I wait for a response, the weight of the situation settles heavily on my shoulders. But for now, finding Deacon is my priority, and everything else will have to wait

Zayn replies a few seconds later

Zayn: 'Deacon is missing? I saw him last night before I left. He was dancing with Lydia. I can meet you at the club later, and we can go over the footage together.'