

Chained By The Alpha By Jessica Hall Chapter 91

"How many people are here, Blake?" Zayn asks, and he turns around. Only now he has a child in his arms. She clings to the shirt Zayn had given him, though the jumper she now wore, it swallows her small frame

"This is Piper, my sister." My brows raise, and I look at Zayn, who seems to come to the same conclusion: if our roles were reversed, we would have all done the same thing, especially when looking into the eyes of a child. Piper appears to be about 9 years old; her blonde hair is matted with mud, grass, and twigs

"Roughly 70 of us are here."

"All from Alpha Joseph's pack?" Zayn asks

Blake shrugs, looking at one of the other men. A man with salt and pepper hair comes closer; he'd have to be the oldest here. "No, some of us are from Alpha Samuel and Alpha Dean's pack; very few, the majority are from Joseph's," he answers

I tilt my head to the side, looking at the man in front of me. He appears to be in his fifties, with salt and pepper hair and deep wrinkles etched into his face. His eyes are a piercing blue. There is something about him that seems familiar, but I can't quite put my finger on it

"You look like your mother, Cleo," he tells me, and my brows pinch, and I worry they would hate me for what my father did to them

"We've been biding our time on returning when you'd have your pack," he tells me, and I chew my lip

"You're from my mother's old pack?" he nods slowly

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"I was one of her Beta's, Beta Noah," he answers, and my heart breaks. That means he was one of the people closest to her that she trusted. Trusted to keep her safe when recognition smashes like a ton of bricks, how had I not wondered what happened to him?

"You saved me that day," I tell him, and he smiles sadly

"She'd never have forgiven me if I saved her over you," he nods once and tears prick the corners of my eyes as I nod. Yet, I wonder if he'd change his mind now after living like this for so long. I look at Zayn. "Please, we can't leave them here," I tell him

"We aren't; I have nowhere to place them; my

pack is already overcrowded, but I will call Greyson," he tells me, wandering off and pulling his phone from his pocket. I move toward Blake

"Oh right, I will take you to my mother," I shake my head

"No need to, we believe you. But tell her to pack what she needs," I tell him. Blake stares at me

"Zayn is organizing to take you all back with us

He's calling Alpha Greyson."

"Alpha Greyson?" The man steps forward, Beta Noah. I turn to him, nodding

"You don't like Alpha Greyson?" I ask

"No, we do. Your mother was his mate. We were all supposed to be merging packs when they got together until your father's mate

intervened." "What?" I gasp in shock

"Alpha Greyson was your mother's true mate, not your father; she was going to merge packs, and we would have become one pack. Linda apparently carried on about that; she didn't want that. Your mother agreed to let him and Linda keep her pack and only take those of us who wanted to leave with her and take you." Beta, Noah tells me

"How many are from the original pack?"

"Most of us, but we never had a chance to merge. The same day she signed the pack over to your father, Linda had her killed. Those who refused to submit were cast out, which is all of us

Zayn nods, pulling out his phone with swift fingers. He moves away just enough for privacy, but I still catch snippets of urgency in his tone

There's no time for pleasantries, not when lives hang in the balance

Minutes stretch into an eternity until Greyson's SUV kicks up dust on the horizon. When he steps out, his expression turns somber, mirroring our own shock as he takes in the squalor before him

Zayn and he shake hands, and Greyson looks over at me, "Please tell me you can take them."

"We have enough space and housing, but I will need to screen them," he murmurs. Zayn goes to say something, but Greyson looks at him. "Don't worry, I'll take them all; I know your pack is overcrowded since you took in that last pack." Greyson tells him, and I look at Zayn, but he doesn't elaborate on what Alpha Greyson mentioned, I'd have to ask him about it later

"Thank you, Alpha Greyson," I breathe out, relief flooding through me, though it can't wash away the sorrow etched into the faces around us

"Let's get those buses arranged," Zayn commands his men who start moving to help pull down tents, and Greyson nods, already dialing numbers and issuing orders with the authority that comes from years of leadership

The commotion stirs the commune, drawing curious, wary faces from their shelters. Eyes wide with a mixture of hope and uncertainty, they watch as salvation rolls in on wheels buses that promise warmth, safety, and a future

"Come on," Zayn yells out, his voice louder than I anticipated, carrying across the broken ground

"There's room for everyone. You're safe now."

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"Is this real?" Blake steps forward, skepticism written in the lines of his face. "Will you really take us in?"

"Not us, Alpha Greyson. We haven't the room, but every last one of you is coming back to the city until you're all housed and settled within Alpha Greyson's pack," Zayn affirms, stepping beside me, his presence commanding attention and inspiring trust

"Get your things," I tell them, my tone gentle yet insistent. "It's time to go home."

And they move, slowly at first, then with growing urgency as reality sinks in. They're leaving this place behind. They're being offered a new start

"Thank you," they whisper, their voices a haunting melody that will stay with me forever

As the buses pull away, we stand hand in hand, watching until they disappear from view before helping the rest of Zayn's men clean up the last parts of the makeshift tent city so nature will take back over and, eventually, the place will be undisturbed. In the quiet that follows, Zayn pulls me close, and I lose myself in the heat of his embrace, in the wild, intoxicating scent that is purely him

“Come on, let’s get home; I am starting to feel like a swamp monster,” I say, my voice muffled against his chest, my body humming with a current that only he can elicit

Zayn pulls something from my hair. “You look

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like one, too,” he laughs, his lips pressing

against my temple. We both snatch up a black bag, stuffing it in the dumpster that sits on the edge of the road leading to the old hiking trail

ok 2k 2 2k ok

I almost groan, stepping under the shower spray; my skin feels icky, and dried mud covers nearly every inch of me. Steam curls around us like a living thing, heat clinging to our skin as the shower drowns out the rest of the world. Zayn’s silver eyes glint in the steam-filled bathroom, reflecting the light like precious metal. In their depths, I see the untamed, fiery energy of his wolf, Zarek, just beneath the surface. The muscles of his arms flex as he moves, his strong hands carefully tracing the curves of my body as he helps to clean off the mud

“Zayn,” I whisper, my voice barely audible

above the rush of water, yet the worry laced in that one word is evident. Guilt gnaws at me, and I feel bad knowing my mother’s people were forced to live like that for years because of Linda and my father

“Yes, we’ll go check the rogues at Alpha Greyson’s tomorrow. You don’t need to feel guilty, Cleo. You didn’t do this to them.” I nod slowly, but his words don’t make me feel any better

He leans in, his lips brushing against the sensitive flesh of my neck, sending shivers down my spine. “Stop, Cleo. You were a child

Stop blaming yourself.”

“I’m not; I know that. I just wonder how I forgot about Noah; I never questioned anything, never noticed my own people were missing.” I mutter

“You were a grieving child, and no one wants to think the worst of their family or to believe their family was capable of such a thing.” I sigh, turning to rinse the shampoo from my hair

Zayn's lips crash against mine, and I sputter under the water. He laughs, pulling me closer, his face going into my neck. "Hm, I can help you take your mind off it, though," he purrs. I push on his chest, and his eyes sparkle with mischief

"You have no idea how much I want you."

I swat his chest before reaching my arms around his neck and standing on my tippy-toes to kiss him. He kisses me back, his lips traveling down my neck. The water cascades over us, a soothing rhythm that matches our heartbeats. Zayn's hands are strong and sure as they glide over my wet skin, the warmth of his touch sending shivers of pleasure through my body. His fingers trace the lines of water droplets that cascade

down my skin, leaving a trail of heat in their wake

Desire coils tightly in my belly. I tilt my head back, offering him more access, and he takes it, his mouth exploring the column of my throat

His tattooed arms encircle me, strong and sure, pressing me closer to the heat of his chest. I can feel the warmth of his breath against my skin as his lips trace a path along my neck, sending shivers down my spine. Every touch, every kiss, ignites a fire within me, fueling my desire even more

"Let's take this... to the bedroom," I breathe out, my fingers entwining with his black hair, tugging gently

Without a word, Zayn lifts me effortlessly, carrying me through the misty veil of the bathroom into our bedroom. The cool air hits my

damp skin, but his body is an inferno against mine, keeping the chill at bay. He lays me down on the bed, his lips trailing fire across my collarbone. My heart hammers against my rib cage, anticipation tightening every muscle. His eyes darken with desire, and he kisses me passionately, his tongue lapping at my lower lip before nipping it gently

Zayn's hand travels down to where I ache for him most, dipping a single finger inside of me, eliciting a moan from my lips. He groans against my mouth, as he slowly adds another finger to join the first, stretching and teasing me. I arch my hips upwards, desperate for more when he pulls his fingers from me

"N..No..." I gasp, my voice husky with need

He chuckles, "Patience love," His dark hands are stark contrast against my pale skin as he cups my breasts, his thumbs flicking over my hard nipples. I arch my back, desperate for more

"You're so beautiful," he whispers reverently, taking one pert peak into his mouth. The sensation of his tongue and teeth on my sensitive skin sends a wave of pleasure

coursing through me. My nails dig into the sheets as he lazily licks and sucks his way to the other breast, teasing and tormenting me mercilessly

My breath catches in my throat when he pushes between my legs, exposing me to his hungry gaze. He spreads my legs apart, and I feel myself dripping with need for him. His silver eyes darken with lust as he stares at my core, his arousal hard against his abs

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“So beautiful,” he rumbles before he lowers himself between my thighs. His tongue flicks out and laps at my folds, making me moan loudly

“Zayn,” I pant, my hips bucking against his mouth. He chuckles against me, gently nipping at my inner thigh before tracing his tongue along my most sensitive spot

“You taste so sweet, love,” he mutters before diving back in. My back arches off the bed as he hits the right spot, his tongue swirling around in slow, hypnotic circles

The pressure builds within me, coiling tighter and tighter until I can’t take it anymore. “I.. I’m

going to-.” His tongue and fingers work against my most sensitive spots, driving me closer and closer to the edge

“That’s it,” he growls, his eyes locking with mine as I break apart in his arms, my climax washing over me like a tidal wave

He crawls up my trembling body, his arousal is hot and insistent against my dampness, and kisses me, forcing me to taste myself on his tongue

He pulls away, leaving me breathless, and I wrap my legs around his waist. “Cleo!” Zayn growls. My fingers trace the scar down his left flank before my fingers wrap around his cock, and I try to pull him closer

He hesitates only for a moment but presses his body against mine when his hand moves to pull

mine away from his cock and he reaches back to unlock my ankles from behind his back

“Hands to yourself,” His voice is rough, laugh laced with a restraint I know is for my sake, but I don’t get why he wants to. We already live together, and I don’t think things can get any more serious than they are, so his hesitation confuses me

But just as his hard length drags across my core, he quickly repositions himself, a shadow crosses his face. He hesitates and then pulls back, leaving an aching void where his warmth once was

“Zayn?” Confusion and a sudden fear grips me

Why is he stopping?

“Cleo, I—” He runs a hand through his wet hair, frustration etched into every line of his body. “T

can’t do this. Not now. It’s not about desire, believe me. It’s...timing, respect. We should wait until you have your wolf.”

“My wolf?” The words taste bitter. “We live together, Zayn. What are we waiting for?”

“It’s not about the physical or our living conditions, Cleo. I respect you too much to rush this,” he says, his eyes pleading for understanding

“Respect?” I sit up, wrapping the sheet around me, suddenly feeling exposed and vulnerable

My heart feels like it’s cracking open, raw, and bleeding. “It doesn’t feel like respect. It feels like rejection.”

“No, that’s not what I meant.” Zayn reaches out, but I flinch away, the movement sharp and involuntary

“Then what, Zayn? Help me understand because right now I’m lost. If you don’t want me, why the

fuck am I here?” I say, my voice is trembling

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“IT want you, Cleo. More than I’ve ever wanted anything. But I want us to be right. You said so yourself before that what you feel could be a sire bond. I would rather wait for your wolf so you know for sure.”

“Real?” I echo, anger flaring hot in my chest

“What could be more real than this?”

"Please, just trust me." There's a hint of desperation in his voice, a plea for patience I'm not sure that I possess

"Trust," I mutter. "There appears to be a lot of that going around, doesn't it? What are you afraid of? I will go running and screaming that you slept with me while I have no wolf; oh, the fucking scandal!"

"You're being unreasonable," he mutters, pushing off the bed. "I'm protecting you!"

"Protecting me or protecting yourself?" I challenge. "Are you scared that I'm a mistake or Just another pawn in your game against my father?"

"Damn it, Cleo, you know that's not true!" His tattooed arms tense, muscles coiling beneath his skin, evidence of his frustration or perhaps restraint

"Then prove it! Show me, Zayn!" My green eyes flash, demanding and seeking an answer that seems to slip further away with each breath

"Proving it isn't about sleeping together," he says firmly. "It's about building something real, something lasting. Can't you see that?"

"Can't you see that every time you pull away, it makes me feel unwanted?!" Tears blur my vision, but pride keeps them from falling. "Every time you stop, it feels like you regret even touching me!"

"Stop saying that," Zayn growls, and for a moment, Zarek, his wolf, seems to flicker behind those silver eyes. "You are not a regret

You could never be a regret."

"Then why does it feel like you're using me?" The accusation hangs heavy between us, a suffocating cloud of doubt. "Is this just revenge against my father? Because if it is, I swear "

"Revenge?" He steps back as if struck, hurt flashing across his features before they harden like stone. "Do you seriously think I would go

this far for revenge?"

"Wouldn't you? As soon as things get serious, you retreat, like I'm some sort of...

mistake you're trying to correct." My voice cracks, revealing the fear beneath the anger

“Being with you is the one thing I’m certain of,” he insists, yet his posture wavers, betraying his words. “It’s not a big deal. You’re making it one

There is nothing wrong with waiting; the last couple of weeks have been hard enough with the dramas with your father without me having to fight you on this, too.” Zayn tells me

“Or is that it? The disgraced alpha’s daughter, painted a whore for the world to see; suddenly you’re embarrassed.”

“Stop putting words in my mouth. I never said that.” He rubs his temples and sighs heavily, as

if the weight of the world rests solely on his shoulders. “Cleo, I am not arguing with you over this; I want to wait. You should want to, too

You’re making a big deal out of nothing. You should have your wolf.”

“I’m an adult; I don’t need my wolf to tell me that.”

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“According to human laws, not werewolf ones, and the fact you’re arguing with me over this shows your maturity,” his words sting more than if he slapped me. Tears prick my eyes

He clicks his tongue and curses under his breath, realizing what he said. “I didn’t mean it like that, I...” he reaches for me, but I pull away

He stands up, his muscles tensing, the struggle plain in his posture. “I think... I need to clear my head. I should check on the club and handle

some things in the city.”

“Go, then,” I spit out, feeling the sting of tears in my eyes. “I wouldn’t want you to be caught with jail bait.” Not that I am, legally, I am an adult; it’s

just an unspoken law for she-wolves to wait until they have their wolves, a way of ensuring women remain pure while the men can do what they want. He knows it, and I know it. They say it’s law, but it isn’t written formally, and quite frankly, if I can vote on city stuff and within the pack councils, I am a legal adult. Getting your wolf is kind of like hitting puberty, or in our case, adulthood, in a sense and is frowned upon since the exchange of fluids can influence she-wolves just like saliva can force a sire bond when healing, yet I never sired to Deacon, and now being with Zayn for the last few months, I know my feelings for him are real, so is it so wrong?

“Damn it, Cleo, that’s not fair,” he growls, the sound almost inhuman, his wolf clearly close to the surface

He turns toward the door, and I reach out,

grabbing his arm to stop him. But he spins around with such force that I release my grip, stepping back in shock. For a fleeting second, I see the wolf in him pushing forward, fighting for control

My hand shoots out to grab his arm, a desperate attempt to get him to stay. “Zayn, please”

But he spins around so fast, I lose my footing,

and it’s not just Zayn who faces me it’s Zarek too. His wolf is there, just beneath the surface, with silver eyes blazing with an intensity that

nearly knocks the breath from my lungs

“Let go, Cleo,” he growls, the deep rumble resonating with a power that’s both terrifying and enthralling

“Zayn...” The word escapes as a gasp, my fingers still clutched around his firm bicep, feeling the

tremors of the beast within him

He shakes his head, a shudder rippling through him, a battle unfolding before my eyes. “T can’t stay. I’m struggling to keep control.”

“Wait.” My plea hangs between us, drenched in desperation

“No. It’s better if I go. There’s something I need to do anyway. I need to check on the club after the rogue attack.” His voice is strained, coated with the effort of restraint

“Take me with you,” I insist, the thought of being left behind adding another layer to the rejection already weighing me down

“Damn it, Cleo, I need to be away from you for a damn moment.” He pulls away, and the absence of his touch feels like ice spreading through my

veins

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"If you want me to leave, just say it." I spit the words out, anger unfurling

"That's not it," he says, but the conviction I crave isn't there. "Right now, I can't trust myself around you, not with Zarek, this close to the edge, he marks you. There is no going back; I have already marked you. Isn't that enough until you get your wolf?"

"Fantastic." Bitterness taints my tone a cocktail of hurt and defiance. "So I'm to be punished because your wolf can't handle proximity?"

"Dammit, Cleo, it's not like that!" Frustration creases his brow. "I'm trying to protect you."

"From what? From you?" My laugh is hollow and void of humor. "Or are you protecting

yourself from me?"

"Stop twisting my words!" He's shouting now, the walls echoing with the sound of his annoyance

"Fine!" The finality in my voice scares even me

"Go check your club. Do what you have to do." I wave him off, moving toward the bathroom to finish my shower

"Enough, Cleo. I get your wolf is close to coming forward, and it's making you unreasonably angry, but I have mine, and you're pushing his buttons." It's a warning wrapped in resignation, and it stings more than any rebuke

"Just go, Zayn," I tell him, and he moves toward the walk-in closet to get changed

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He pauses at the door, his silhouette a dark

reminder of everything we're on the brink of losing. Without another word, he walks out, and I'm left with the echo of our heated argument and the fear that this time, he will tell me to leave. The moment I hear the door slam shut downstairs, guilt and humiliation slam into me violently, and I wish I could take back everything I said

~Zayn~

The thumping bass of the club vibrates through me as I push my way through the sea

of bodies

The club's neon lights are a pulsating heartbeat

My wolf, Zarek, snarls beneath my skin, restless, yearning to go back to our mate

"Zayn!" Vance's voice cuts through the noise as I reach the bar and order a drink. His dark hair is a stark contrast against the shimmering backdrop of our club. I nod at him, signaling to

talk in private. I down the drink in one go, feeling the burn trail down my throat, and the girl behind the bar slides me another one, and I head toward the VIP section upstairs, where my office is

We weave through the crowd to the quieter back office, the scent of musk and alcohol clinging to the air. Once the door shuts, the sound muffles into a distant throb

"You alright? You look furious," Vance says, leaning against the desk. The dim light casts shadows across his concerned face. "What happened?" he asks

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I sink into a chair. The weight of my restraint is heavy on my shoulders. "Cleo and I had a fight."

He crosses his arms. "I want her to see the bond for herself. To feel it, to recognize it... without me forcing it upon her."

Vance raises an eyebrow. "You're running out of time, Zayn. And she'll know once she has her wolf, anyway. Why not just tell her? Let the mate bond do its work." I drink my glass of whiskey

"Is this about tradition because no one follows tradition anymore? I know mom liked the idea, but it is unrealistic?" He probes, refilling my glass

"Partly." I take a smaller sip this time, letting the whiskey linger on my tongue. "But it's more about respect. Cleo's been sheltered, kept away from pack politics and wars. She views the world with a purity that's... rare."

"Rare or naive?" Vance interjects

"Both," I concede. "Which is precisely why I want her to come to me out of love, not obligation or some predestined fate. I want to wait until she accepts the bond because she feels it, truly feels it."

"You don't seem convinced, since when did you care about waiting? I'm sorry, brother, but it sounds more like you're trying to protect your virtue, not hers," he laughs. "Which the entire city knows that's been gone a while," he laughs

I chuckle because he's right, but maybe that is why I want to do things differently with Cleo. If

I had known I would find my mate this early in my life, I would have waited for her, too

"To the rest of the city, it looks like I kidnapped her and turned her against her father, and I am not stupid. She questions that herself," I say, worry edging my voice. "Her 19th birthday is close. It's a rite of passage for she-wolves. She needs to feel the connection organically. I don't want any doubt in her mind when I claim her if it's a sire bond or in the city's eyes that I forced a mate bond with her."

"She would still recognize her mate if it weren't you, I don't get it, a mate bond will always

overpower a chosen bond, marked or not." I lean back, rolling the empty glass between my hands

"I know that, I..." I put my head in my hands

"She has already let me mark her, yet still believes I am rejecting her by not sleeping with

her." Looking at Vance, I see it clearly on his face, he does not understand my reasoning. Now I am starting to doubt it myself

"Alright, Alpha," Vance concedes with a sigh

"But be careful. If your wolf takes over..."

"Zarek is restless, but he understands." I stand up, the scar on my flank pulling slightly a reminder of battles fought and those yet to come. "I need to do right by her. By both of us. I want her to mark me when we reach that part, to complete the bond fully; I don't want to spoil it for her. It's how it should be, and I know she won't mark me until she has her wolf."

"Good luck convincing him to be patient until her birthday."

"He'll manage." I say, but the certainty doesn't quite make it to my own ears

"Come on, you can drink, and I'll drop you home afterward. At least then I won't have to worry about Zarek going crazy on her if you've passed out."

"I have meetings tomorrow. I'll have a few more, but then I should head back." I admit, and he nods, sliding the bottle of whiskey over to me

28 2K 2 2k ok

~Cleo~

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The clatter of pots and pans echoes through the empty kitchen as I rummage for the right skillet

The sharp scent of rosemary and thyme fills the air, a fragrant attempt to mask the tension that

still lingers from the fight with Zayn. My hands shake a little as I place the pan on the stove, the flame springing to life with a click and whoosh

I'm not the best cook I know that but it's the gesture that counts, right? A peace offering in the form of a cooked meal since that is the only thing I can possibly offer him. The silence in our home is suffocating, each tick of the clock stretching the distance between us. Zayn could walk through that door at any moment, or he might stay away until morning. There's no telling when he'll return, but I feel worse knowing he left his own house to get away from me

My fingers fumble with a tomato, slicing it more clumsily than I'd like to admit. I wish I could slice away the regret just as easily, peel back the layers of our last conversation, and start fresh

The sizzle of garlic in the pan is a small victory as I toss in the chopped vegetables. I hover over the stove, stirring with more vigor than necessary

I let out a deep breath, watching as the steam dances upwards, mingling with the fading daylight. My thoughts drift to Zayn, his touch, a lingering promise of raw passion and untamed desire, always leaves me aching for more and also distracts me from the task at hand

The sizzle of the pan escalates too quickly, the pan catching on fire, the scent of charred meat and vegetables replacing the rich aroma I had intended, and I race to shut the stove off and try to rescue the steaks; the flames rise higher. I drop it in the sink, turning the tap on. My heart sinks as I peek into the skillet my attempt at a perfect steak, now an overcooked slab, blackened beyond recognition. With a frustrated groan, I slide it into the trash. Grabbing a tea towel, I open the sliding door off the side of the kitchen that leads outside and try to waft the smoke outside, hoping not to set off the fire alarms

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Thankfully, they don't go off, but now I am left with attempting to find something else to cook

"Damn it," I mutter, scouring the freezer for anything else suitable, but it's mostly roasts, which need to be thawed out, or meats I don't recognize, but they certainly aren't steak

Wait the basement

I remember there's another freezer down there, probably stocked with something salvageable, and I make a beeline for the door leading downstairs

Mid-step, my phone buzzes alive with Zayn's ringtone a flutter of relief that has butterflies

swarming my belly, knowing he can't hate me if he is ringing. I fumble for the device, answering the call with a quick swipe

"Hey," I breathe out, anticipation knotting my stomach

"Cleo." Zayn's voice is a soothing balm laced with regret. "I...I'm sorry about earlier. That shouldn't have happened."

My chest warms at his words, and I quickly apologize. "It's okay. I'm making dinner as a truce?"

"Truce accepted," he says, a soft chuckle vibrating through the line. "I'm on my way home. Vance is driving me. Apparently, he doesn't want me driving since I had a few drinks."

"You're drunk?" I ask him while feeling for the light on the wall

"No, but he insisted. Just... don't set the place on

fire while you're at it."

I can't help but laugh despite my culinary mishap moments ago. "No promises," I reply, playful yet sincere. "But I'll try for your sake."

"Good," he murmurs, and I can almost see the smile tugging at his lips, those silver eyes glinting with mirth. "I'll be home soon; we are

just pulling up at the gates now."

As I find the light switch, I step onto the cool concrete steps of the basement, and I focus on the task at hand

“So, what are you cooking?” Zayn asks

“I have no idea yet,” I laugh

The chill of the basement wraps around me like a cold embrace as I make my way to the old freezer tucked in the corner. The scent of damp earth mingles with the anticipation of Zayn’s return, igniting a fire within me that contrasts sharply with the frigid air

Boxes are stacked on top the freezer, and I quickly remove them, setting them down. “Hang on a second; I need to set the phone down,” I murmur to Zayn, a smile playing on my lips. My fingers wrap around the freezer’s handle, and I pull it open with a decisive tug. “Just put me on loudspeaker; at least then I will definitely hear the fire alarm go off.” I laugh softly into the emptiness, thinking of Zayn’s playful warning

The icy breath from the freezer hits my face as I peer inside, searching for something to salvage

this dinner disaster. But the laughter dies in my throat, a gasp escaping me instead. My eyes widen, and my heart hammers against my rib cage a primal drum of shock and fear. There, beneath a bag of frozen peas I just moved, lies a body-pale, stiff, unmistakably human

“Cleo? Are you there?” Zayn asks, and I snatch up the phone

“Zayn, yeah, I am-” My voice cracks, but he cuts me off. While I can’t take my eyes off from the horror in front of me

“Hey, I just pulled up. You better not be burning down the kitchen again,” he teases through the phone, his voice a soothing balm that suddenly feels like poison

I can’t speak. I drop the phone; it clatters on the concrete floor, the sound echoing in the hollow

space. My gaze is locked onto the body, onto the familiar features now frosted over. It’s Deacon

My Deacon, who disappeared without a trace, is now found in the most horrific place

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imaginable

Why is he here, in Zayn's basement, frozen and lifeless, hidden in the depths of this

chilling chamber? His once vibrant eyes are now glazed over, his skin a ghostly pallor, besides the blood and bruising that paints his skin. The frozen stiffness of his limbs tells a haunting tale of his final moments, which seemed brutal because of the amount of blood covering his body like frozen icicles

Why is he here?

The realization slams into me, leaving no room for doubt. When I remember Zayn's callous words over the last couple of months, how he

seemed unfazed by Deacon's disappearance, sure he didn't like Deacon, but he did almost seem mocking of it. This was Zayn's doing. A dark, twisted betrayal disguised by the man who claimed to want to be my mate. He knew all along where he was. He knew and even helped me put up missing posters when his body was here all this time. Zayn's actions were not only callous, but malicious and deceptive – a deliberate attempt to manipulate me into believing Deacon had run away, despite knowing the truth all

along

My knees buckle, and I collapse beside the phone, my mind racing and my heart splintering. The world tilts and the shadows of the basement seem to close in around me, suffocating, as the truth claws its way through my shattered illusions. When I hear the car outside pulling up, I know I need to get out of here

The weight of my betrayal, the gut-wrenching realization that I had been deceived by the one person I thought I could trust, threatens to consume me

Forcing myself to my feet, tears stream down my face as the full weight of my

foolishness and the magnitude of Zayn's betrayal hits me. I feel like a puppet, manipulated and used by someone I loved and trusted. My mind swirling with a mix of

anger, grief, and disgust. How could I have been so blind? Lydia was right all along, and I foolishly ignored her warnings. Now those same warnings echo in my mind, haunting me with the truth I had refused to see. The realization that Zayn used me, manipulated me, hits me like a tidal wave, leaving me questioning everything he has ever said or done

Chained By The Alpha By Jessica Hall Chapter 97

The depth of his deception is beyond comprehension, and I can't help but wonder what else he has lied about=

My heart clenches with the realization that I may not have truly known him at all. The foundation of trust we built is shattered, and I'm left wondering what else he has lied about and what other secrets he's hiding. All this time, while I've wondered where Deacon was, he was right under the very house I have been fooling around with his murderer all this time. Disgust washes over me

The evidence was there, but I didn't want to believe it. Now, I can't help but question everything Zayn has ever told me. The chill of

the basement is nothing compared to the ice flooding my veins as I stare at Deacon's lifeless form, his face pale and haunting beneath the frost as I slam the freezer door shut, looking for another exit frantically, but the only way out is up the stairs right next to the front door

"Cleo!?" I hear him call out upstairs before hearing the door shut. "Your phone must have

cut out," he yells out before everything falls silent

As I stand frozen in the basement, my heart pounds in my chest like a relentless drumbeat

The air feels heavy with betrayal and my mind races with a whirlwind of emotions. Fear grips me as I realize that I am trapped, caught in a web of lies and deceit. Every fiber of my being screams for escape, but I am paralyzed by the weight of what I have discovered. The suffocating darkness of the basement mirrors the

suffocating grip that Zayn had on my heart, and I can't help but wonder if I will ever truly be free from his manipulation

"Cleo?" He says, though there is nervousness in his voice this time, when I hear the door to the basement creak, and I know I've been caught

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~Zayn~

I stare at the phone. "Cleo?" I say while unclipping my seatbelt

Vance looks at me. "What's wrong?" Vance asks

"Nothing, the phone cut out; I think she dropped her phone. I better check she isn't burning down the house." I laugh, opening my door. Vance drives off as I fiddle with the keys, unlocking the place and stepping inside

Silence greets me like an unwelcome omen as I step into the foyer, my pulse quickening with a strange foreboding. "Cleo?" I call out, my voice echoing off the walls, unanswered

I glance around as I step into the vast mansion foyer, its empty halls echoing with my footsteps

Worry gnaws at me as I call out Cleo's name, but there is no response. The silence is suffocating, amplifying my concern for Cleo's safety

I clutch the phone tighter, still blank like the phone is connected; it's just dropped service

"Cleo?" I call out. My heart hammers against my chest as I press the end-call button. Something's wrong

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"Damn it," I mutter under my breath, tossing my phone on the nearest table. I make my way through the silence, every nerve in my body on

high alert. It's too quiet the kind of quiet that has my wolf on edge. I check the kitchen, but she isn't there, before making my way back into the hall. I take a deep breath and scan the living room- -no sign of her. I creep into the hallway, my heart pounding in my chest

"Cleo?" I call out, wondering if she is upstairs or playing a prank

My eyes dart across the room, and they settle on the basement door, slightly ajar. I stop in my tracks, my gaze going to the open door. I take a deep breath and slowly walk towards it. My stomach knots as I take in the scene before me

A cold shiver runs down my spine. I never leave that door open. Panic courses through me I know before I even move that she is in the basement

With heavy, urgent steps, I rush toward the

doorway, taking the stairs two at a time down into the dimly lit basement. The basement is dimly lit, with flickering overhead lights casting eerie shadows against the cold concrete walls

The air is heavy and musty, carrying a sense of foreboding that sends a chill down my spine. As I descend the stairs, the silence becomes even more palpable, intensifying

the feeling of dread that hangs in the air. The sight that meets my eyes steals the air from

my lungs

There's Cleo, her shoulders shaking with silent sobs, her blonde hair cascading over her face like a curtain hiding her pain. She's staring at something or someone in front of her. My fists clench as I follow her gaze to the closed freezer

Cleo, usually vibrant and full of life, now appears fragile and broken, her vulnerability emitting an aura of despair. Panic engulfs me as

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I realize the gravity of the situation, my mind racing with dark possibilities. As my eyes meet Cleo's, the realization dawns on me that she has already looked inside the freezer, and that she knows what I did

"Cleo?" My voice cracks, rough with barely contained rage and fear, but I'm careful to keep my distance, remembering how much she hates being cornered when upset. Her green eyes, usually so vibrant, are dull with betrayal and hurt, and it claws at me. I step closer, and she steps back, frightened of me

"Don't come closer," she snarls, her eyes narrowing as she glares at me

"I would never hurt you, Cleo," I tell her, trying to remain calm when all I want to do is grab her

"You think killing Deacon didn't hurt me?" she

scofts despite her heartbreak

"You looked in the freezer..." I know she did

She just admitted, but it wasn't a question, but just an acknowledgment of what she found in it

"Stay back!" she hisses, her voice laced with betrayal as I reach for her. "Don't touch me, Zayn!"

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The command slices through me, a direct hit to my heart. But I respect it because that's what you do when you love someone you give them space, even when every instinct tells you to pull them close

"Okay, okay," I whisper, raising my hands in surrender, my skin itching with the need to shift to let Zarek take over and handle this mess

"I can explain," I try to tell her, and she glances at the freezer

"You lied." I shake my head. And something changes in her demeanor, her face twisting with fury

"It's not like that, Cleo. You know I would do nothing to hurt you," I tell her, trying to get closer when her eyes dart around the basement in panic, looking for an escape route, but I can see she also knows the only one means having to pass me

"He's been here all this time?" she asks, her voice breaking

"Come upstairs, I'll explain," I try to grab her, but she makes my hands

"Get away from me!" Her voice is sharp, like shattered glass, and it stops me cold

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I reach out, trying to brush her arm with the tips of my fingers to offer some semblance of comfort. But she recoils as if my touch burns her skin. "Don't touch me!" Cleo screams, her eyes wild with hurt

She makes a break for the stairs, but I can't let her go, not like this. My hand wraps around her wrist, pulling her back, and her reaction is immediate and violent. She swings at me, her fist connecting with my jaw as I grab her, only for her nails to rake across my cheek, and I taste blood

"Stop, Cleo! I'm not your enemy," I try to reason, but she won't hear it

"Let me go!" She kicks out, connecting with a spot that sends agony exploding through me. I double over, releasing her instantly as her foot connects with my balls. I growl, and she darts up the stairs while I try to catch my breath

"Vance," I mindlink quickly, fighting through the pain. "Lock the place down. Now." I tell him, rushing up the stairs after her

I reach the top just in time to see Cleo darting toward the keys of my car that isn't here. Her movements are swift, almost a blur, desperation fueling her

“Dammit, Cleo, listen to me!” I shout, but she’s already snatching the keys and spinning toward the exit

“Stay away from me, Zayn!” Her voice breaks, a harrowing sound that tugs at my soul

But I can’t stop the need to protect her from herself and from what she is refusing to let me explain. I chase after her, catching glimpses of her blonde hair as she maneuvers through the house with frantic energy

“Please, Cleo,” I call out, my own voice strained with emotions too tangled to unravel. “We need to talk. Just... stop running.”

But she doesn’t stop. She never does. And as she reaches for the door and rips it open and I grab her from behind, trying to haul her back into the house when she bites me viciously, drawing blood before swinging her head back. It connects with my nose, and I feel the crunch of her breaking it. I let her go and curse

The night swallows her whole. Cleo’s fleeing form pauses, realizing my car isn’t here. Her blonde hair whips her face as she looks for another way before she takes off down the driveway. Zarek presses against my skin urging me after her. My men, hearing the commotion, start coming out of their houses, seeing me chasing after her and moving to help

Two of my men block her off, and another grabs her; she struggles and starts screaming like she is being murdered, the sound tearing at me, hearing how terrified she is

“Stand down!” I roar, my command slicing through the night air as my men move to intercept her. They hesitate, confusion etched on their faces, but they obey, stepping aside

They let her go instantly, but Cleo isn’t slowing down. She spins and delivers two precise and powerful blows that send Jax and Kieran to the ground with thuds that resonate within me

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“Dammit, Cleo!” I shout after her, my voice rasping with desperation

Ignoring the pulsing pain where she bit me, I give in to the primal surge within, allowing my bones to shift and my skin to stretch. The world blurs, senses heighten, and my wolf takes over with a growl that rumbles from deep within

She's almost at the gates when he reaches her, the scent of her fear filling his nostrils. I can't let

her leave, not like this, and Zarek reluctantly hands me back control as he shifts

"Help! Someone" Cleo's scream pierces the night just as she grabs the gate. But before she can climb, I'm there, enveloping her struggles with my larger form

"Shhh," I whisper fiercely, clamping a hand over her mouth. "Cleo, stop. I won't hurt you."

Her teeth sink into my hand, the sharp pain igniting a flare of anger in Zarek. I fight it, fight him, as she struggles in my hold. She struggles even harder, her desperation and fear palpable. I take a deep breath, trying to remain calm, and step towards her. I cup her face in my hands and look into her eyes, pleading with her to understand but she refuses to listen, refuses to see past her grief

Chained By The Alpha By Jessica Hall Chapter 99

"Stop this, Cleo! You're safe with me." My words are a growl, the human part of me clinging to control by a thread. "Don't do this..."

But she does, and I feel Zarek's dominance surges forward, wanting to claim her to force her stay

The scent of her fear and her sharp teeth are sweet with defiance, snaps the fragile leash I have on Zarek. He lunges forward, a snarl ripping from his throat as he pins. Cleo against the cold metal of the gate. The primal urge to claim her, to mark her as mine, thrums through every fiber of my being

"Zayn!" Cleo's voice is muffled against my hand,

but the terror in her green eyes slices through the haze of my wolf's instincts. "Please, don't!"

"Vance!" I scream mentally through our pack link, the urgency breaking through even as Zarek's growls fill the air. I'm losing myself to him; my wolf is too strong and too desperate to keep her here and him marking her, there won't be any escape from me

I hear the rapid patter of paws before I see Vance's dark form blur into sight. His wolf, massive and bristling, barrels into Zarek with a force that sends us both tumbling away from Cleo. Teeth flash, and pain sears along my flank where Vance's fangs sink into Zarek's hide

Vance's wolf snarls, and he positions himself between Cleo and me, a protective barrier that Zarek rages against

“Mine,” Zarek growls back, but Vance’s wolf doesn’t relent

“Control it, Zayn!” Vance’s human voice echoes in my mind, insistent and fierce. “You need to control him, Zayn!” he says, like he believes I am not trying hard enough, but Zarek is in panic mode, thinking his mate is leaving him, rejecting him

Cleo scrambles away, her breath coming in ragged sobs. She’s cornered, terrified, her gaze flickering between the two wolves locked in combat. I can feel her heart pounding, the rush of her blood calling to the very core of my wolf

“Stand down, Zarek,” I command, fighting to infuse the order with all the authority I possess

Vance’s wolf tears into Zarek, who attacks back while I struggle to control my wolf as Kieran and Jax move to help him, but they don’t shift. I

feel the change in Zarek, realizing if he attacks them while they aren’t shifted, he can seriously hurt them

With a final, grudging retreat, Zarek backs down as I yell at him to stop fighting me. Vance doesn’t move, his body a living shield as he watches Zarek warily, ready to strike again if necessary

“Give him control, Zarek. Before you lose her for good,” Vance urges through the link, his words a lashing reminder of what’s at stake

Shifting back is agony-bones realigning, flesh knitting together as I force the shift back while Zarek tries to stop me. I stand naked and vulnerable in the chill night air, silver eyes fixed on Cleo’s trembling form

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“Cleo,” I rasp, my voice hoarse with the

remnants of Zarek’s fury. “I would never hurt you.”

But the words hang heavy, tainted by the shadow of what has just unfolded. The distance between us feels like a chasm, one forged by fear and mistrust, and I’m uncertain if it can ever be bridged again

“You killed him,” she chokes

“It was justified; even Alpha Greyson agreed,” I tell her, but she shakes her head

“You lied, and said you had no idea when Lydia and I asked. Fuck’s sake, you even helped me fucking look for him!” she screams. I move toward her, but she scrambles to her feet, ready

to run, but Vance’s wolf cuts her off, and Jax and Kieran flank her

She panics, spinning toward me. “Please, you need to listen,” I tell her as I grab her. She thrashes, hitting and kicking me, but she stands no chance against me without her wolf; she knows it, and I know it. But still, she tries

“You’re a liar, you’re a fucking liar. I hate you!”

“I have proof,” I tell her, crushing her to me, my chest pressing against her back as I lock her wrists together at her chest with my hands

“You’d say anything, wouldn’t you? How can I believe a single thing you fucking say now?” she screams, struggling harder. My canines slip out, and my anger gets the better of me as I squeeze her with my teeth going to her neck

“He was trying to rape my mate!” I snarl at her, and she freezes. “I wasn’t going to let him hurt you,” I murmur. She shakes her head, not

wanting to believe me, not wanting to believe my words

“I can prove it. I have video footage from the club,” I tell her, knowing Vance is smart enough to have kept a copy in case we ever needed it

Her entire body trembles in my arms, and I can feel her shock, though I am not sure what is shocking her most, learning I am her mate or that her ex tried to rape her. She stares at me in disbelief, her eyes wide. I take her face in my hands and look into her eyes, my heart aching for her pain. I know I need to tell her the truth; I have no choice now. I just hope she believes me

Chained By The Alpha By Jessica Hall Chapter 100

Nothing makes sense to me anymore. I feel like I can’t trust anyone at the moment as I sit on the sofa in the living room while Zayn waits to be sent some video footage that will apparently prove killing Deacon was justified, yet death is never the answer. There would have been other options, but I just can’t picture Deacon ever doing that to me. It makes me question everything more. I have known Deacon for years and Zayn for three months, yet he expects me to believe Deacon is capable of something so vile

I’m torn between the Deacon I know and the watching of the supposed evidence Zayn says he has. It’s difficult to trust my instincts when my emotions are clouded by doubt and confusion. I

never thought I would find myself in such a predicament, questioning the character of someone I thought I knew so well. It has me questioning Zayn and his intentions, why would he keep this secret and help me search for my boyfriend, only to then say this?

Zayn's phone rings loudly and he starts downloading the supposed footage

"Ts that it?" I ask as he stares down at his phone

He clenches his jaw, watching whatever it is. I stand up and he curses under his breath. "What is it?" Task. Zayn looks up at me, his face a mask of emotion. He quickly shuts his phone screen off, looking angrier

The air is heavy with tension as Zayn paces in front of me, desperation evident in every movement. His silver eyes lock onto mine, pleading for understanding. "Cleo, please, just

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listen to me," he begs

"Show me, you said you have proof!" I tell him, and he looks like he is about to toss his phone, his anger growing by the second. "I have it, but please, baby, you need to believe me, the footage-" I hold my hand out for his phone, ignoring his words; he said he has proof, and I want to see it

My heart hammers in my chest, betrayal gnawing at me like an insistent beast. I cross my arms defensively and glare at him. "And why should I? You have lied to me from the start

Now give me the phone, Zayn, or I am leaving." I snap at him. He takes a step back, his face a mask of confusion. I take a deep breath, trying to steady my nerves, and then speak again

"What have you got to hide? Just show me."

"Because I love you, and this isn't helping!" he

exclaims, his voice cracking. He reaches out to touch my arm, but I yank it away, unable to stand even the slightest contact with him right now

"Love? Is that what you call this?" I scoff, feeling my vision blur with unshed tears

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"You've done nothing but lie to me, Zayn! And for what?"

He clenches his fists, the muscles in his tattooed arms and chest trembling with barely contained emotion. "I did it to protect you. I swear, Cleo, everything I've done has been for you." "But how can I trust that, Zayn? This whole situation has left me questioning everything, including your love for me. I need more than just words to believe you now."

"I was trying to protect you!"

"Protect me? By keeping secrets and manipulating me?" I shake my head, anger and hurt swirling together into a maelstrom of emotions that threatens to overwhelm me. "How can I trust anything you say anymore? You helped me look for my boyfriend, knowing he was dead. Do you understand how sick that is? How fucking callous and cold!"

"Please, just give me a chance to explain." Zayn's voice is barely above a whisper, the raw vulnerability in his eyes threatening to break through the walls I'm desperately trying to build around my heart. "I'll do anything to make this right."

"Anything?" My voice wavers as I look into those silver eyes, searching for any hint of deception. But all I see is pain and longing the same feelings that are tearing me apart inside

"Anything," he promises, his voice thick with emotion

"Then give me that damn phone," I demand, my own voice trembling

Zayn's tense form paces in front of me, agitation rolling off him in waves. He holds his phone tightly. The video footage paused on the screen, displaying Deacon leading me to his car. "Just watch it," Zayn insists, silver eyes pleading, desperation etched onto his handsome face

He passes me the phone and I peer at the screen that is paused still. Gathering my courage and with a deep breath, I press play, knowing I am about to witness my ex's death. Tears roll down my cheeks as I watch the footage, knowing this is the last moment I spent with him, according to Zayn

The footage rolls, capturing the tense scene as Deacon guides me towards his car. Yet I have no memory of this, and it is clear that I am blind drunk. Nothing appears overtly suspicious; I lean against him as he unlocks the vehicle, and I start sliding along the car side before Deacon catches me. Deacon appears to be laughing as he opens the back of his car and sets me on the tailgate. I can't see anything going on because of the

tinted windows, but Deacon doesn't appear to be doing anything sinister from the angle. Not that I can see much since there are so many cars in the parking lot

Zayn suddenly comes into the picture and moves toward Deacon, who even seems carefree as he addresses Zayn, laughing

The poor quality of the video and the lack of sound make it difficult to discern the motive behind this attack. This chaotic scene leaves me questioning the reliability of Zayn's claims

Zayn and Deacon say a few words, but nothing in Deacon's behavior suggests he is doing anything wrong; he even motions towards me in the car and laughs. Zayn nods, scratches his chin, and then turns into a savage