

Chained By The Alpha By Jessica Hall Chapter 21

My brows furrow at her words, Lydia knows I am not much of a drinker. I am just going there to spend time with Deacon, not get wasted

Shaking my head, I move for the front door, and there is only one thing that can help me forget the suffocating tension at home-going out and having some fun. I need to get out of here, away from Lydia's snide comments and my father's overbearing presence

As I step outside, the cool evening air hits me, a welcome relief from the stifling atmosphere of the house. I take a deep breath, trying to calm the storm of emotions raging inside me. I can't let my family's drama dictate my life. With a burst of defiance, I pull out my phone and dial

Deacon's number

"Hey, Deacon, are you still at the club? I need a break from this hellhole," I whisper urgently into the phone

"Of course, Cleo. I've been here for ten minutes waiting for you, I was wondering when you'd show up," he replies, his warm voice soothing my frayed nerves. "Whose phone are you calling from?" he asks as I unlock my car

"Ah, new one. I got it today. I'll see you soon," I tell him, hanging up

I climb into my car, the familiar scent of leather and pine air freshener enveloping me. I start the engine, the purr of the motor a comforting sound. As I pull out of the driveway, I glance back at the house, a sense of determination settling over me

The drive to the club is quiet, giving me plenty of time to think of a way to build up the courage to tell Deacon about my father's plans to marry me off. Outside the club, the thumping music vibrates through my body as Deacon and I wait in line to go into the club. Yet, the longer I wait, the dizzier I feel. I grab Deacon's arm, and he glances at me. "Are you okay?" he whispers

I nod, must be vertigo, must be from the painkillers," I answer

He presses the back of his hand to my face. "Do you want me to take you home?" he asks. I shake my head, knowing it will wear off when I hear her nagging voice

"Deacon!" Lydia calls, and I groan. Deacon turns just in time for her to throw her arms around his neck and lean into him

"Hey Lydia, Amber," he states, and Lydia steps back. Deacon gives Amber a hug, and she pecks his cheek

"I thought you were going to be here earlier?" Deacon tells them, and I cut him a glare. What does he mean?

"Wait, you invited them?" I ask him, and he looks at me

"What, they wanted to go, chill out Cleo, you know I'm friends with them. What's got into you?"

"Gee, I don't know, maybe the fact you asked me to go to the club with you but decided to invite your ex and my bitch step-sister along," I snap at him, and my eyes go to Amber. "No offense, Amber," I tell her. Truthfully, Amber wasn't so

bad when she wasn't around Lydia

"Jealousy is a curse," Amber pipes in, while Deacon tries to defuse the situation

Deciding to let it go, I turn back to the line. No wonder Lydia was so eager for me to go earlier

She knew it would piss me off when I learned Deacon invited them

Putting those thoughts aside, I decide despite this, I want to enjoy myself. Once inside,

I feel a sudden jolt of energy, ready to dance my problems away. But that energy quickly dissipates when I lock eyes with a tall handsome figure across the dimly lit room. Zayn. His silver eyes pierce into mine

"I need a drink," I tell Deacon, who nods,

leading me to the bar

"What do you want?" he asks

"Just water," I tell him

"Oh, come on, Cleo. Have fun, live a little," Lydia purrs, coming up behind me. "My treat!" she taunts, flashing her card at me. It's not like I have a card of my own. My father took mine after Lydia stole it and racked up a huge bill

My father had been furious, and took it back

Now I get a cash allowance from working for him, which was dwindling fast after Lydia reversed into my car, cracking the radiator and crushing the front end. So I am glad I no longer have to worry about that bill after my father paid it

"Fine!" Lydia orders us drinks, something called a fruit tingle, it is sickeningly sweet, and

I sip mine, not intending to get drunk

Deacon leads me to the dance floor, yet that lasts all of five minutes before my leg starts

throbbing, and I have to sit down

I sit in one of the booths, watching Deacon dance with Lydia who is shaking her ass all over him along with Amber, who at least has the decency to keep her distance. Lydia gives no fuck who she makes uncomfortable

“Shouldn’t you be home resting?” Zayn demands, his voice a low growl coming from behind me. I jump not seeing where he came from

“Last time I checked, you weren’t my keeper,” I retort, refusing to let him control me like everyone else

“You’re right, but I saw you by yourself and wanted to check on you,” he tells me

“I’m fine,” I tell him, and he sighs

“I can see that with the way you’ve been glaring at your little boyfriend, who’s dry humping your sister on the dance floor.”

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“He’s not dry humping her. They’re friends,” I tell him, and he laughs

“That’s debatable with the way he has his hands all over her,” he says, shaking his head

“Like you know anything, they’ve been friends since they were kids.”

“With benefits by the look of it.”

I growl at him, now he is deliberately trying to get under my skin

“Just stop, I’ve put up with enough drama today

I don’t need you getting in my head trying to

cause more.”

“Right, I’ll leave you alone. You’re right, I don’t know the little worm well,” he says, setting his glass on the table beside me

I peer up at him, towering over me when he leans down, so close I can smell the whiskey on his breath. "But just for the record, I wouldn't be able to get in your head unless you suspected they were fooling around already."

"They're just friends," I repeat, my voice a growl

"You keep saying that, but if it is true, why has he left you here while he dances with her?" he asks, and his words sting

His words are true. When I complained about my leg, he didn't bat an eyelash in my direction, Just waved me away

"Something to think about, Cleo. But you can do better. He isn't worth your time."

"Then who is? You?" I scoff and he shrugs

"Well, if you were mine, I wouldn't be caught dead with another woman, let alone have my hands all over one," he whispers. I swallow, and he smirks before standing back up, and I find Deacon staring in our direction. Suddenly, a bouncer taps Zayn on the shoulders

"Alpha, a fight has broken out upstairs."

"Shit, show me," Zayn says, following him, I shake my head, turning my attention back to the dance floor where I notice Lydia is gone and Deacon is making his way over to me

"What did he want?" he asks, and I shrug

"Wanna get out of here?" I ask him

"Lydia just went to get us all more drinks." I huff

"What's wrong?" he asks. I point to my leg

"An hour more than we'll go," he says, and I

shoot him a dirty look. "Promise," he tells me when Lydia hands me a drink. I shake my head

"Come on, don't be a party pooper," she whines

"[have to drive," I remind her, and she shrugs

“Catch a taxi; I can run you back in tomorrow to get your car,” she tells me, holding out the blue-

colored drink. Reluctantly, I accept it, sipping it when Amber comes over

“Deacon, come dance with me!” she whines, giving him pouty lips. She tugs on his arm, and I raise an eyebrow at him. He mouths sorry and lets her pull him back toward the dance floor

“One hour, Deacon!” I yell out over the music

He blows me a kiss, holding up one finger, indicating an hour

For the next hour, I tried to lose myself in the pulsing beats and flashing lights, but I can’t shake the feeling of Zayn’s gaze on me

Gradually, I begin to feel strange. Something is definitely wrong. I get up and make my way toward the bar to ask for some water. My face is tingling, and I hear my words slur when I speak

The lady at the bar grabs my arm as I sway on my feet, and my surroundings blur. “I’m fine

That drink was stronger than I thought,” I say, shaking her hand off. I have to get out of here. I

turn and look for Deacon

Yet, the mish-mash of bodies on the dance floor blurs around me, the music dims as my hearing moves in out from loud to soft. My head feels heavy, my tongue thick, my limbs not wanting to cooperate

“Deac”, I don’t feel so good,” I mumble, clutching his arm for balance when I find him

“Can you take me home?”

“Sure thing, Cleo. Let’s get you out of here,” he says, leading me through the throng of sweaty bodies

The world spins around me as Deacon guides me to his car, parked next to mine

“No, you’ve been drinking,” I tell him

“Ring my father,” I tell him, willing to take his wrath then wrap ourselves around a pole

or kill someone

“Actually, just let me lay down for a bit,” I tell him, my legs feeling like lead weights

“Want to lay down in the back until your father gets here? Your car’s too small for that,” he suggests, opening the hatch. Grateful for the offer, I nod weakly, letting him help me into the trunk. As soon as I lay down, my body feels impossibly heavy and unresponsive

“Deacon, I can’t feel my body,” I try to say, but the words come out garbled and distorted as panic creeps in. Instead of offering comfort, Deacon climbs in beside me,

closing the hatch and plunging us into darkness

“You’re alright,” he murmurs, brushing my hair

back from my face. His touch should have been reassuring, but it only heightened my unease

“Did you call my Dad?” I ask him, my eyes flutter closed, and he says something, but my hearing is funny

He leans down and presses his lips against mine, ignoring my feeble attempt to turn away

“Deacon, did you call...” My words are cut off by him gripping my chin forcefully, he my mouth with his tongue, his kisses growing more eager and desperate

invades

“Deacon, what are... no,” I slur, my words nothing but a garbled mess as I try to push him off me, but my arms feel limp and useless

Ignoring my protests, he lifts my butt up and rips down my leggings and tears open

my cami, leaving me vulnerable and exposed. My mind

races, searching for an escape, but my body refuses to obey

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The tension in the air is palpable, a dangerous energy that makes my skin crawl. Deacon’s voice is barely recognizable, his words slurred and filled with a malicious intent that I never thought him capable of. The sense of betrayal cuts deep, leaving me feeling cold and hollow inside

“Deacon,” I whisper weakly. My vision blurs as fear creeps in while I wait to wake up from this nightmare. It has to be a nightmare, Deacon would never. Once again, my eyes flutter shut, though my mind screams for me to wake

“Stop, Deacon,” I manage to say when I hear the unmistakable sound of his zipper. The dark haze encircling my mind is suffocating, like a vice

grip around my consciousness

“Don’t be such a prude,” Deacon growls, his voice cruel and unfamiliar. “Two years, Cleo, and we still haven’t fucked. So Lydia gave you a little something to help you relax.”

Lydia, I know I’ve heard the name before but can’t place it as my mind is overrun with the

foreign feel of my body. Deacon pulls my underwear down

I can feel him moving my limbs like I am a puppet, and he is the puppeteer, and the next second, bright light sears my eyes and then again and again. I hear the distant sound of laughing, but I am struggling to remain conscious.

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“You better keep your fucking word,” I think I hear, but I can’t be sure when the flash goes off

again. The ceiling swirls when I see a phone before another flash that blinds me

I struggle to keep my eyes open, to fight against the darkness that threatens to engulf me. Each flash from the phone is like a physical assault, disorienting and terrifying. I want to scream, to run, to do anything but lie here helplessly, but my body betrays me, refusing to respond to my desperate commands

Tears form in my eyes, but my body remains unresponsive to my desperate pleas for it to move, to do anything. My heart pounds in my chest as the gravity of the situation settles upon me, making it even harder to breathe

“Deacon?” I slur, wanting him to get me out of whatever is going on

Deacon’s laugh is cruel and mocking, a sound

that sends shivers down my spine. “You’re mine,” he slurs, his words dripping with possessiveness. “I’ve waited long enough for this.”

Suddenly, the door of the wagon is ripped open

"What the fuck, man," I hear a voice say

"She said no!" someone snarls, but I can't see them; my eyelids are now too heavy to open, but whoever it is, his voice carries an authority that sends shivers down my spine. Yet, I know that voice from somewhere. I'm sure of it

My heart races, pounding against my rib cage as if trying to escape the nightmare unfolding around me. I can hear the sounds of a scuffle, the grunts and shouts muffled as if coming from underwater

"Whoa, calm down, man! You can have a go

after me," Deacon retorts. It's Deacon! My mind tries to zero in on the other voice. It's a voice of power, of control, and it stirs something within me, a flicker of hope in the darkness

The sound of a struggle intensifies, the thuds and crashes reverberating through the wagon. I can sense the violence, the raw aggression of the confrontation, but I'm powerless to intervene

My eyes flutter shut again, the effort to keep them open too much for my drugged body

The darkness is all-consuming now, a suffocating void that seems to stretch on endlessly. I'm lost in it. I can feel myself slipping away, the edges of my consciousness fraying and dissolving into nothingness

Then, suddenly, a burst of light pierces the darkness, followed by a loud crash. The wagon

shakes violently, the sound of rattling glass and groaning metal filling the air

There's a final, decisive thud, and then silence

The oppressive weight of the situation lifts slightly, the air no longer thick with the threat of violence. I can sense someone else in the wagon now, a presence that is both comforting and terrifying in its intensity

Gentle hands lift me, cradling me with a tenderness that is in stark contrast to the brutality of moments ago. I can feel the warmth of the person holding me, a sense of safety that I cling too desperately

"You're safe now," the voice murmurs, its tone soft and reassuring. "I've got you, Cleo. You're safe."

over me and take away the fear and pain. But the darkness is too strong, pulling me back under with an irresistible force. I surrender to it, letting it envelop me completely, the last remnants of consciousness fading away into oblivion

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~Zayn~

I glare at the thrashing bodies on the dance floor, my heart pounding with frustration. After handling the fight, I headed upstairs to watch those dancing below and to keep an eye on Cleo. However, when Cleo rises from her seat, I instantly know something is wrong as she stumbles to the bar, and my stomach twists with unease, feeling the flickering of my bond to her

Zarek nervously presses beneath my skin, urging me to go to her, but she has no idea who I am to her. Cleo, vulnerable and unaware of our bond, struggles to maintain her balance at the bar. Her light blue eyes are unfocused, and her blond hair clings to her flushed cheeks

“Hey!” I mindlink Clara, the barmaid. “Don’t serve her. She’s already drunk.” My finger jabs in Cleo’s direction, and Clara’s concerned gaze follows

“Alpha Zayn,” Clara’s mind links back a moment later, “she wants water, not liquor.”

“Where the hell is Deacon?” I growl inside my head, my body tense. He should be taking care of her, but he’s nowhere to be found

My wolf, Zarek, presses restlessly beneath my skin, urging me to intervene, but I resist. It’s not our place not yet

“Boss?” Clara’s voice penetrates my thoughts again

“Stay with her,” I order through the mindlink, my eyes fixed on Cleo. I can’t shake the feeling

that something is wrong, which eats away at me

“Boss?” Clara mindlinks, drawing my attention back to the bar. “I don’t think she is drunk. She

can barely talk. Is she on something?”

I peer down at her to see her sway, and Clara reaches over the bar, grabbing her arm to steady her. “No, she’s only been drinking,” I reassure her

“She’s only had two drinks all night, and I don’t know, boss, something 1s off with her though she seems really out of it.”

I see Cleo shake Clara’s arm off and stumble into the fray of people grinding on each other

“TI handle it,” I mindlink back, moving toward the stairs when another fight breaks out. This time between two men when one glasses the

other one. I am shoved backward and turn, grabbing the man who shoved me. Recognizing me, he freezes and places his hands in the air

“Sorry, Alpha Zayn,” he stammers

“Get out of my club,” I snarl back before shoving him. He nods, and I see one of the bouncers coming up the stairs. Meeting him halfway down, I pause. “Handle them for me.” The bouncer nods, and I continue down the stairs looking for Cleo, yet she isn’t on the dance floor or at the bar. Moving towards the bathrooms, I bang on the ladies twice before pushing the door slightly open

“Cover up!” I order before hearing shrieks

Stepping in, I walk around

“Any of you seen a girl wearing a black leather jacket and a blue cami and black leggings?”

The women shake their heads, some looking concerned, others irritated by my intrusion. I keep my gaze focused, not allowing myself to be distracted by their scantily clad bodies

“Damn it,” I mutter under my breath, feeling desperation claw at my insides. Leaving the restroom, I try to think of where Cleo could have gone. My wolf, Zarek, is growing increasingly restless beneath my skin, picking up on my own mounting anxiety

I move to the men’s toilet when I remember her phone. Pulling mine out, I find hers, which I linked to mine to keep tabs on her. It takes me a few seconds to realize she 1s outside somewhere but hasn’t left the parking lot

I walk to the front, bumping into people as I am too busy watching my screen when I walk out the front. Zarek 1s suddenly frantic, pressing

against my skin, and my blood boils when her fear hits me, battering against me. A second later, I am hit with her fear

“Where are you, Cleo?” I growl to myself, storming through the crowded parking lot until I spot her car. My heart races as I move toward it, only to hear a whimper from the car beside it, and something flashes in the back

Moving around her car I get to the car beside it and find Deacon texting when I spot her. Her leggings are pulled off and discarded, her shirt torn open, and I can see claw marks down her left breast when I notice she hasn’t got any underwear on

Her legs are pulled apart, her knees held flat against the carpet of the trunk by his knees, her stitches torn wide open, and blood cascades down her leg onto the carpet. But that is not the

most disturbing part, it’s the glazed-over look on her face, and I realize he was taking pictures of her in such a vulnerable state

She whimpers when he leans down to fondle her breast. And she tries to speak, but her words are garbled. Looking back at Deacon, he pockets his phone and shoves his pants down his legs. I rip the back hatch open, and he jumps, startled

Deacon shrieks. “What the fuck, man,” he snarls

“She said no!” I roar, grabbing the back of his shirt and ripping him from the car

“Whoa, calm down, man! You can have a go after me,” Deacon retorts. A whimper escapes her lips, and I want to comfort her, but first I need to deal with this prick

My fist connects with his face as I fight my wolf from shifting. If Zarek takes hold, this kid will be dead, no doubt. He drops to his knees when I grab the hatch, slamming it down on his head repeatedly until he crumples to the ground

Bending down I fetch his phone from where it fell on the ground. I go through it,

deleting the pictures only for a message to come through from Lydia. I glance at Cleo, her step sister is the only person I know with that name which makes me curious. I open the text message and see Deacon had sent the photos to her. My stomach sinks, and I try to unsend the images but can’t since she already opened them

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Now why would he be sending these to her? Pocketing the phone, I nudge Deacon with my foot. He is definitely out cold

Lifting the hatch, I find Cleo passed out. Her leg is bleeding everywhere, her blood staining the carpet beneath her

“Fuck!” I curse, pulling my jacket off and placing it across her waist to cover her. She whimpers, “Shh, I won’t hurt you, love,” I whisper while clamping my hand over her leg

After a second, I decided to take her. Opening the mind link, I search for my brother, and he answers immediately. “What’s up?”

“Vance,” I send through the mindlink, my voice tense and urgent. “Are you still here?”

“Yeah, out back. What’s wrong?” he replies, a hint of concern in his tone

“Bring my car around to the front, look for a blue wagon, and hurry,” I command him

“Okay, give me a sec.” Using her leggings, I wrap her leg as best I can

The anger and fear brewing within me is almost palpable, but I can’t let it consume me - not now

Not when Cleo needs me

“By the doors or the other end,” Vance responds, and I can sense him moving quickly to follow my orders

“Midway,” I answer

As I wait for my brother, I glance down at Cleo, my heart aching at the sight of her battered, vulnerable state. Her golden hair is matted with sweat and blood, and her once beautiful blue eyes are tightly shut, as though she’s trying to block out the world around her. I want nothing more than to hold her close, to whisper sweet assurances in her ear, to do whatever it takes to make her feel safe again

When headlights light up the car park, I peer over the roof of the car, realizing how packed the place is. Opening the mindlink again, I contact the bouncer, seeing the huge group of people waiting out front

“Let them all in,” I tell him

“Pardon, boss?” Stuart replies

“Let them in. I need this parking lot cleared

now!” “On it,” he obeys

I stick my head out, peering over at the entrance doors when Vance pulls up with my car. I grab Cleo from the back. “Open the back door,” I order, and he does so quickly while he glances around

“We’re kidnapping girls now?” he asks

“No, just my mate,” I tell him, and he seems startled by this information. Shutting the door, I pop the trunk, and he follows

“What’s going on?” he gasps, spotting a bleeding Deacon on the ground

“Grab his legs,” I tell him, and he does. I shut the hatch quickly and we then chuck him in the

trunk. I fish in his pockets, retrieving his keys and tossing them to Vance when Deacon begins to stir, his eyes fluttering open. Panic fills them when he sees me looming over him

“Please,” he begs, his voice weak and broken

“You can have her. Just let me go.”

My anger flares at his words, and I can’t help but snort derisively. Grabbing the front of his shirt, I pull him close, my voice low and dangerous

“Oh, I will,” I say, my eyes never leaving him

“Because she’s my mate.”

I headbutt Deacon, sending him straight back into unconsciousness. Slamming the trunk shut, I turn to Vance, my expression hard. Tossing him the keys to Deacon’s car, I point at it. “Burn it, then meet me at the packhouse.” Vance

doesn’t question me, just moves to do as he is told while I slide into the driver’s seat

The drive back to the packhouse is tense, each mile seeming to stretch on forever as I glance at Cleo in the rearview mirror. She’s still unconscious, and I can’t help but worry about her condition. Zarek, my wolf, paces restlessly inside me, eager to tend to our

mate

As we drive back to my packhouse, I can’t help but steal glances at Cleo, her chest rising and falling with each shallow breath. Her scent fills the car, a heady mix of fear, pain, and that irresistible honey-jasmine fragrance that is uniquely hers

Finally, we pull up to the impressive packhouse – an amassive stone mansion nestled deep within a lush forest. The moonlight filters through the trees, casting a silvery glow over the sprawling

grounds and intricate gardens

I carry Cleo inside, cradling her in my arms as I climb the staircase to my room. Using my foot I push the door open to reveal a spacious master bedroom decorated in warm, earthy tones. A roaring fireplace dominates one wall, while floor-to-ceiling windows offer a breathtaking view of the dark forest beyond. In the center of the room sits a large, luxurious bed, which is where I take her

I lay Cleo gently on the bed, her eyes fluttering open for a moment before she suddenly vomits onto the sheets. "Shit," I mutter, quickly pulling her hair back, so it doesn't get dirty. "Hang on, love."

I hurry to the bathroom to grab some towels and wet some washcloths in the basin.

As I enter the bedroom again, I find her slumped over, laying

in her vomit

"Shower it is then," I mutter, moving toward her

I scoop her up and take her into the attached bathroom, filled with warm golden light and smooth marble surfaces. I turn on the shower, but Cleo is a dead weight in my arms, a rag doll, making me feel sick knowing he could have done anything he wanted to her, and she would have been none the wiser

Keeping an arm around her waist, I carefully remove her ripped top and unclip her bra,

doing my best to be gentle and not let my gaze linger too long on her naked form. Her body is petite but strona, her curves enticing even in her current state. Checkina

waking. Eventually, I am forced to sit with her, and I pull my shirt off, which is sticking

to me like a second skin

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Cleo leans heavily against me as I pull her closer, so she isn't drowning under the stream of water, letting it wash over us both. Her eyes are closed, and she takes deep breaths of the steamy air as I pour shampoo and massage it into her scalp with soothing motions

I take my time cleaning every inch of Cleo's body, rinsing away dirt and dried blood, when I notice her leg 1s still bleeding badly. Despite knowing that I shouldn't, I pull her legs up, so she 1s sitting across my lap. Leaning down, I trace my tongue along the wound before watching my saliva heal the jagged gash cutting across her thigh

I'm going to have fun explaining that tomorrow

It's taboo, and she may see it as a direct violation or assault. Werewolf saliva heals, but it also can make the healed's wolf sire to them, our DNA mingling, which is why it is supposed to be something reserved for mates. But even then, it is rare, and I learn why pretty quickly when my leg starts throbbing painfully. I suck in a breath at the pain. She's been walking around with, but lucky it fades quickly. Though now I understand more clearly why, a more serious injury may kill the healer, yet I don't think I would be able to help myself

Cleo shivers, her skin prickling with goosebumps, and she mumbles incoherently as I sit up. Her face moves as she sniffs the air. "You smell nice... like chocolate and..." she trails off, mumbling incoherently

"Thanks," I chuckle, trying to keep things light despite the gravity of the situation. The tension

is palpable, as if one wrong move could send everything crashing down around us

"Ow!" I exclaim when she suddenly bites me, her teeth sinking into my chest. I look down at her, surprised by the sudden act of aggression

Her eyes are glazed over, and I realize whatever she was given is strong; I don't even think she realizes I am not her vile boyfriend

"I'm hungry, but you don't taste how you smell," she pouts

"Alright, alright," I laugh, a hint of relief washing over me. "I'll feed you, just don't eat me

She buries her face in my chest, leaning against me for support as the water cascades over both of us. Within seconds, she is completely passed out again. As I carefully support Cleo in the

shower, the sight of her leaves me momentarily breathless. Even in this vulnerable state, there's an undeniable beauty about her that's impossible to ignore. Her blonde hair, damp from the water, clings to her fair skin, framing her delicate features. Stray strands stick to her cheeks and forehead, and I find myself gently brushing them away, my touch as light as a feather

Her eyes, a striking shade of green that remind me of the lush forests surrounding our territory, are closed now, her long lashes casting shadows on her cheeks. Even when she's unconscious, she's still fierce, a sign of her Alpha lineage. It's this combination of vulnerability and strength that draws me to her, igniting a fire within me that I struggle to contain

As I wash her, my hands move with a gentleness, acutely aware of every curve and contour of her

body. Her skin is soft under my touch, and I

can't help but admire the way she's built – strong yet undeniably feminine. The water cascades over her, tracing a path along her collarbone, down her chest, and over her toned stomach. I'm torn between my duty to care for her and the growing desire that's threatening to overwhelm my senses

Despite the heat stirring within me, I remind myself of the circumstances. She's hurt, and vulnerable. The thought of taking advantage of her in any way repulses me. She deserves respect, care, and consent things I'm determined to give her, regardless of how much my body aches to claim her as mine

Holding her like this, feeling her body against mine, is both a torment and a privilege. Every nerve in my body is acutely aware of her, of the softness of her skin and the gentle rise and fall of her chest as she breathes. But my role right

now is to protect her, not to give in to the primal urges that her presence evokes

Once she's clean, I wrap her in a towel and carry her back to the bedroom, taking care to avoid the soiled sheets. Not having any clothes for her, I slip one of my shirts over her head and place her on the chaise. I quickly strip the bed and remake it before laying her on the fresh linen. Tucking her into bed, I can't help but admire how peaceful she looks now, her breathing steady and even

"Rest now, Cleo," I murmur, brushing a stray lock of hair from her face. "I'll take care of everything." I press my lips to her cheek and want nothing more than to climb in with her,

but I have to take care of the parasite in my trunk

I make my way downstairs, my thoughts a

whirlwind of concern and anger as I consider the events of the night. As soon as I reach the first floor, Vance appears in front of me. "Took care of the car," he says, his expression dark and unreadable. "It's gone."

"Good," I reply, trying to keep my voice steady

"I left her keys out in the kitchen for you

Retrieve her car and bring it back here.” My brother nods, but there’s a question in his eyes that I know won’t go unanswered

“Zayn, why didn’t you tell me? And are you going to tell her?” Vance asks, his voice low and urgent. “She deserves to know.”

“Because firstly, she can’t recognize me,” I admit quietly, my chest tightening with unease. “And I would rather not put her in danger. At least not now, with all the drama going on between the

packs, they could use her against me.” My resolve hardens as I consider the lengths I’ll go to protect Cleo

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“Alright,” Vance concedes, though I can tell he doesn’t fully agree with my decision. “Just... be careful.” With that, he turns and leaves the room, his footsteps echoing through the corridor

I step outside, taking a deep breath of the cool night air. Popping the trunk, I find Deacon still passed out, the sight of him igniting a fresh surge of fury within me. Every muscle in my body tenses as I stare down at him before I drag him out of the car and down to the basement

His unconscious form is limp and heavy, forcing me to grit my teeth with the effort it takes to move him

“Damn it,” I curse under my breath, my heart

pounding in my chest. The basement door creaks open, revealing an unfinished space filled with equipment and boxes. I haul Deacon’s body over the threshold and let him drop unceremoniously down the stairs and onto the cold concrete floor

“Let’s see how you like being vulnerable,” I growl, my voice low and menacing as I tower over him. My body aches with the need for retribution, but I know that simply hurting him won’t be enough. He needs to understand the gravity of his actions

“Please,” Deacon moans weakly, his eyes fluttering open as he starts to regain consciousness. “I didn’t... I didn’t mean...”

“Save it,” I snap, cutting him off before he can finish his pathetic excuse

“You’re going to pay for what you did, and the best part?” I tell him, grabbing him by the shirt and dragging him to the center of the basement where the pulley is. He tries to scramble away, but my order rushes over him. Pathetic, he’s weaker than an Omega

He freezes, and I grab rope and tie his hands before pulling them above his head and attaching them to the pulley. Hitting the button on the wall, he is hoisted until his feet no longer touch the floor. However, I need to figure out what I am going to tell Cleo. No doubt she will question how she got here, also her boyfriend’s whereabouts when he is suddenly missing, vanished without a trace

Walking over to the table where the tools are, I find a dirty rag one of the painters left last time they were here. I turn back to him, and he

whimpers, begging and pleading, but I stuff the

rag in his mouth and secure it with duct tape

“Can’t have your screams waking my girl now, can I?” I tell him. His eyes widen, and I crack my neck

“I wasn’t planning on going to the gym today, but you’ve changed my mind,” I tell him when my fist connects with his sternum

As I stand over Deacon, a sense of cold fury washes over me. The memory of finding him attempting to violate Cleo, my mate, in her vulnerable state fuels a primal rage within me

My clenched fist collides with his sternum, the sound of the impact echoing in the basement like a thunderclap. His body jerks with the force, a muffled cry escaping through the gag

Each punch I land is a release, a physical manifestation of the anger boiling in my veins

My knuckles meet his flesh with brutal precision, leaving behind a blossoming map of bruises and swelling. Deacon’s eyes, wide with fear and pain, flicker with the dawning realization of his grave mistake. He struggles weakly against the restraints, his futile attempts only adding fuel to my rage

I pause for a moment, my chest heaving, as I watch his battered form swing slightly from the pulley. I lost control, and he is no longer breathing, and I look down at my hand where his heart now rests. The satisfaction of seeing him helpless, paying for his heinous act, courses through me. But there’s no time to revel in this retribution. Cleo, injured and unconscious, needs me

Glancing around the basement, my eyes land on the chest freezer tucked in the corner. It’s large enough, a temporary solution to hide Deacon’s

body until I can deal with it properly. With a grunt, I lower him to the ground and untie his hands. His body is limp, a dead weight, as I drag him across the floor. The scrape of his body against the concrete floor fills the room as I haul him towards the freezer

Lifting him is a task, his body an unwieldy burden in my arms. With a heave, I hoist him up and over the rim of the freezer, his body landing with a dull thud against the icy interior. I slam the lid shut, the sound a final note in this dark, quiet room. The freezer will preserve him until I can dispose of him permanently, ensuring no trace of him is left to be found

Turning away from the freezer, my thoughts immediately return to Cleo. My heart aches at the thought of her in pain, her trust violated in the worst way possible. I need to be with her, to ensure her safety and comfort. With one last

look at the sealed freezer, I make my way back upstairs, my mind already focusing on Cleo

As I ascend the stairs, each step brings me closer to her, to the Woman who has unwittingly become the center of my world. My mate. My responsibility. My priority. And no one will dare touch her once I make her mine

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The sun blazes through the white curtains, burning my skin to a crisp as I jerk up from my slumber. Where am I? A violent headache has taken over my body and I groan in pain

Squinting against the bright light, memories of last night flickered in my mind some of which were very hazy

I groan in pain as my head throbs some more. I scrunch my eyes shut against the light and rub them, trying to remember what happened

Finally, I open them and my eyes dart around the large room, searching for a familiar face

Eventually, they land on him – he is standing by the window, looking out into the cityscape. His

hair is wet, looking as though he recently showered. A pair of gray sweatpants cling to his frame

Confusion bubbles inside me as I glance down at my unfamiliar clothing. It's not mine or Lydia's. My fingers nervously graze the fabric before I shift my gaze back to him, no longer able to contain my curiosity or anger

“Did we...?” The words almost die on my lips, but I say enough to make him understand. He shoots me a wicked smirk before his expression softens into

seriousness. An uncomfortable tension hangs in the air. Anxiety surges inside me as dread begins to fill my veins

“Oh, you were being serious?” he laughs, and I glower at him. His laughter only grows louder, and I can’t help but feel embarrassed

“Trust me, if we did, you wouldn’t be questioning if we had,” he replies, a hint of amusement laces his tone, but I notice the way his eyes flicker

I want to look away, but instead my gaze lingers on his face. His expression is unreadable, and he seems to be lost in thought

I take a deep breath before speaking up again

“Well, someone’s got tickets on themselves,” I retort and immediately regret it when his face hardens

“No, I’ve seen every inch of you, Cleo,” he spits angrily. “I know exactly the damage I would have caused you had I helped myself to your body.” My face heats up as I tug the shirt down, trying to cover myself up more

It’s then that realization starts to fill me up-this

isn’t just some small mistake, this could have been a lot worse than what it already is, and it scares me deeply

He must sense my fear because suddenly, his expression softens, and he crosses his arms over his massive chest, causing the muscles to ripple beneath his skin

“Tf I wanted to fuck you, I could have easily

You’re just lucky that I’m not into Somnophilia with drunk girls.” My heart hammers in my chest, and I try to process what he is saying

“Stress less, I never stole your virginity,” he mocks with a roll of his eyes

My mind races, searching for any signs that I’d had too much to drink. But all I could remember was arguing with Zayn, then after that nothing

My eyes widen. Why don’t I remember anything after speaking with him?

My mind mulls that over for a second. Oh, my what does Deacon think, did he see me leave with him? Why didn’t he stop me? My eyes move to Zayn, who is watching me,

the intensity in his gaze holds me for a few seconds before a thought flickers through my head and comes out my lips in a snarl

“What did you do to me?” He seems taken aback by my words

“Did you drug me? Is this some sick revenge to get back at my father?” I accuse, outraged that he would... he would... not steal my virginity?

“You did not just accuse me of raping you!” he scoffs. I say nothing, just stare at him, not knowing what else to do. I don’t remember coming back here, I don’t remember anything after seeing him. I shake my head, only the

motion makes my head pound worse and I clutch it regretting the action instantly

“Why don’t I remember anything then?” I mutter, panic coursing through me. I can feel the tension in the room, thick and palpable like a heavy mist clinging to our skin. When I open my eyes, Zayn presses his hands on either side of my hips. I move away from him as he leans closer. I swallow at how close he is, his scent overwhelming my senses

“Maybe ask Deacon that question?” My brows furrow and shoves off the bed

“Your so-called boyfriend is great at watching over you. Someone slipped something in your drink while he was grinding against your sister on the dance floor,” he spits, anger seeping through his words

“She is not my sister, and I told you they are...” I start to say, but he cuts me off

“Yeah, I know they’re just friends right, the kind that rub genitals together on a dance floor? I saved your ass, just in case you’re wondering. I

could have left you, but I...” he doesn’t finish, just shakes his head

In the overwhelming silence following Zayn’s words, my mind races with a whirlwind of emotions. His gaze lingers on me, intense and unsettling, as if he’s trying to decipher my thoughts. The air between us is charged with a tension that I can almost touch

His proximity is disarming, the heat from his body mingling with mine. Despite my turmoil, I can’t help but notice the way his muscles move under his skin, the way his eyes hold mine with a fierce intensity. It’s a dangerous dance, this

push and pull between us, and I find myself both repelled and drawn to him at the same time

I wrap my arms around myself, feeling suddenly vulnerable in the oversized shirt. “Why should I believe you? You could be making all this up just to... to get back at me for something.”

Zayn’s eyes darken, and he runs a hand through his hair in frustration. “I have no reason to lie to you, Cleo. You should be thanking me, not accusing me of lying or accusing me of— I saved you, that is all that matters.”

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“Saved me how?” my voice shakes, and I fight back the tears that threatened to spill

“Someone slipped something in your drink,” he tells me. “I found you in the parking lot... trying to drive home,” he answers. Why would anyone

drug me? And why did he care enough to help me?

I open my mouth to say something, but then close it again, not knowing what to say. “And

Deacon just let me try to drive?” I ask him. He shrugs

“No idea. He was too busy, not dry-fucking your step-sister and his ex.”

“Stop saying that! You make it sound like he was doing something wrong!” I snap. His eyebrows raise almost into his hairline

“Because he is wrong! You shouldn’t be with him! You’re not his!” he snarls

“What the heck are you talking about?” I growl back at him, and why is he getting so mad? Of course, I would assume he did something when I wake up, not remembering how I got here! Zayn sighs heavily and pinches the bridge of his nose, letting out a deep breath

I struggle to process everything he’s saying about Deacon and Lydia. It feels like a betrayal, a wound that’s too fresh and raw. “You’re wrong,” I whisper, more to myself than to him

“Deacon wouldn’t allow someone to do that to me and there is nothing going on with him and Lydia!”

Zayn’s expression softens slightly, and he takes a tentative step closer. “Cleo, I’m just telling you what I saw, he abandoned you. I wish it weren’t true, but I can’t change the facts.”

“You have a mate out there. One that abandoned you. Deacon clearly isn’t yours, so I don’t get why you’re with that loser, or he would have

told you, you were his mate.” He shakes his head

“Yeah, but heaps of people choose mates, they don’t actually have to be fated, and I, for one, don’t even believe in fated mates. Look at my father’s mate, real catch, she’s nothing but a gold digging bitch. I rather skip on the mate’s part, thank you,” I tell him, and he shakes his head

“And you think Deacon isn’t after the same

thing? He knows you’re the next Alpha, he becomes your mate, you become his Luna while he steals your title right out from under you,” Zayn states

I’d never thought of that, but Deacon wouldn’t do that. We’ve been together for two years, not once has ever mentioned becoming Alpha once I take over the pack

However, Zayn’s words about Deacon seeking power through me echo in my mind as I try to piece together the fragments of last night. I barely remember anything. I remember seeing him dancing on the dance floor, that’s it. The concept of him using me for his gain feels like a foreign thought, yet it gnaws at the edges of my consciousness

“I never thought about it like that,” I admit reluctantly, the realization leaving a bitter taste

in my mouth. “But Deacon isn’t like that. He cares about me.”

Zayn raises an eyebrow, a skeptical look crossing his features. “Does he? Or does he care about what being with you can get him? Think about it, Cleo.”

His words sting, and a part of me wants to defend Deacon, to deny Zayn’s accusations. But another part, a growing, nagging doubt, wonders if there’s some truth to them. The world of pack politics is a complex web of alliances and power plays, and I’ve always known that being the next Alpha would put me in the center of it

all

“Even if what you’re saying is true, what does it matter?” I challenge, trying to mask the turmoil

inside me. “I don’t need a fated mate, fate can be wrong, look at my mother, fate really fucked her

n Over

Zayn's gaze softens, and he steps closer, his presence overwhelming. "You might be surprised at what fate has in store for you."

The proximity between us is electric, a current that seems to flow from him to me, igniting a fire that I didn't know existed. His eyes search mine, and for a moment, I feel as if he's looking straight into my soul

The room feels charged with an energy I can't explain, and I find myself leaning towards him, drawn by an invisible force. His scent envelops me, a heady mix that makes my head spin when he speaks again

"Doesn't matter, not now anyway. Just do what you want, you wanna stay with the fool, be my guest. Just know that you're safe. And nothing

happened between us," he says, his gaze holding mine. I suppose I should be grateful it was him and not someone else with more sinister intentions

"Thank you," I whisper, feeling a little relieved but still uneasy. He nods, his eyes never leaving mine, as if trying to reassure me without words

But the tension remains, undeniably simmering between us a heat that refused to be extinguished, and his gaze is intense

And though I know I should be grateful for his help, I can't help but wonder what it would have been like if something had happened between us. This dangerous thought sends a shiver down my spine and ignites a fire deep within me that threatens to consume my very being

"Look, I wasn't drunk, I had two drinks and I definitely didn't take any drugs voluntarily, and

I am sorry you had to babysit me. But you are wrong about Deacon, he wouldn't abandon me," I insist, my voice trembling with embarrassment

The heat between us is undeniable, but so is the humiliation

"You are seriously still doubting me? See for yourself." Zayn hands me his phone, and

on the screen is a video of me being carried inside the packhouse by him, clearly not in control of my own body

"Your so-called boyfriend left you alone while you were like that."

I chew my lip, tears threatening to spill at the thought of Deacon just abandoning me. I hand the phone back to him. "But why am I wearing your shirt?"

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"As I said, you threw up on yourself. I showered you." He shrugs, though his eyes burn into mine with an intensity that makes my heart race. My face flushes at the realization that he'd seen me naked, he had said it, but I was kinda hoping he was joking, and that he had his cleaner or maid or someone else do it. As if sensing my discomfort, Zayn leans over me, gripping my chin and forcing me to look at him

"Don't worry, you have nothing to be ashamed about," he smirks, and I swear I notice a glint of desire in his eyes. He lets me go after a few intense seconds

And I move to the edge of the bed, only to realize I have no underwear on, I awkwardly pull the shirt down trying to conceal myself

"Let me guess, you took me to the hospital too?" I snap, trying to regain some sense of control as I climb off the bed, only to notice that my injured leg is now completely healed

"No, I healed you," he replies simply, shaking his head

I stared at him in disbelief. "You what?" I ask him. Healing like that was incredibly rare and dangerous; it is taboo for a reason. Mates would only heal each other in the most dire of circumstances, and even then, such an act could be fatal for the healer. Why would Zayn risk his life for someone who meant nothing to him? When another thought occurs to me, he could have sired me by doing so, meaning my wolf would obey him

"Please tell me you're joking right now?" he folds his arms across his chest and raises one eyebrow at me. "Do I look like I am joking?" he asks, and I swallow

"But you could have sired my wolf before I even got it!" I snap, annoyed at him, though that may explain the weird attraction I've had toward him since waking up

"I can't believe this, I saved your ass just to get abused over it, gee thanks," he snaps, making me feel guilty

"It's not that.... Please don't tell my dad about this," I plead, my voice barely audible. I shudder at the thought of what he'd say or do if he found out. What if he strips me of my title? Especially if Zayn has in fact, sired my wolf to obey him? That would put the pack at risk

"Fine." I let out a breath of relief when he speaks again

"But

you have to go to breakfast with me," Zayn says with a grin. My heart leaps in my chest

What if we're seen together?

"Not anywhere anyone will see us together," he says like he was almost reading my thoughts

"So what will it be?" he asks

"Deal," I agree, a shiver running down my spine and I stand up only to look down

"Ah, Zayn?" I ask, and he tilts his head to the side

"My clothes?" I ask and he blinks at me

"Ah, right. You threw up on them. I threw them in the bin."

I glance down at the shirt I am wearing, I can't go to breakfast like this and certainly not home in this. My eyes widen in horror, another thing I will need to explain to my father

Zayn moves toward me and I peer up at him when he grabs my shoulders. I stare at him like a damn moron when warmth rushes through me

Oh, no, what if he did sire my wolf? He must realize where my thoughts went because he chuckles and rolls his eyes, steering me toward the bathroom

The bathroom is spacious and modern, with gleaming fixtures and a large, glass-walled shower

"I think

you sired

my wolf!" I blurt embarrassingly, and my hands move to my mouth

"Why? Fantasizing about me now?" he purrs

"And you don't sound the least bit upset about that!" I growl

He appears to think for a second. "Nope, not at all," he chuckles

Zayn's nonchalance about the possibility of having sired my wolf only adds to the swirling chaos of emotions inside me. His casual dismissal of something so significant makes my head spin, but his next words stop me dead in my tracks

"Would it be such a bad thing if I sired you?" he muses, a mischievous glint in his eyes. "At least I know how to treat a woman."

I scoff at his audacity. “Really? You? How exactly would you treat me differently?”

He steps closer, and the intensity of his gaze sends a thrill down my spine. “For starters, I wouldn’t leave you vulnerable and alone at a club,” he begins, his voice low and steady. “I’d respect you, protect you...” His words trail off, but the implication hangs heavy in the air

I roll my eyes, trying to mask the effect his words are having on me

His proximity is overwhelming, his scent enveloping me, making it hard to think. The idea of being with Zayn, of being his, sends a jolt of excitement mixed with fear

through me

His words, though seemingly playful, carry a weight that’s impossible to ignore

“And how exactly would you do that?” I challenge, my voice barely above a whisper

Zayn’s smile evolves into something more

predatory, his eyes darkening with a hunger that sends a rush of excitement through me. He steps closer, so close that I can feel the heat radiating from his body. His hand lifts, tracing a line down the side of my face, his touch feather-light yet sending shivers down my spine

“You have no idea, Cleo, how much I could appreciate you,” he murmurs, his voice a low, seductive hum that vibrates through me. His hand moves lower, skimming the curve of my shoulder and down my arm, leaving a trail of heat in its wake

His other hand comes up to gently cup my chin, tilting my face up to his. “I’d worship every inch of your body,” he continues, his gaze locked onto mine, intense and unwavering. “Every curve, every line...” His fingers trail down to the neckline of the oversized shirt I’m wearing, teasing the edge of the fabric