

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 101

“Ah!” Claudia screamed. Her foot twisted and she fell straight to the ground.

† was stunned for a second. I hadn’t even used much force-how did she fall so easily?

Behind me, a cold voice suddenly rang out:

“Aria!”

I turned my head.

A figure strode over, brushed past me, and went straight to help Claudia up from the floor.

“Damon...” Claudia slowly stood up with his support. Her eyes filled with tears as she cried silently, looking pitiful.

“Are you hurt? I’ll take you to the emergency room.” Damon frowned as he asked her.

Claudia held tightly onto his arm. She pressed her lips together and looked down, playing the victim perfectly. “I’m fine... I’ll feel better after resting... hiss...”

Before she finished, Claudia let out a soft cry of pain.

Watching this scene, I almost wanted to applaud. Claudia’s acting skills deserved an Oscar. Being an

architect was such a waste of her talent.

Damon glanced at the gift box scattered on the floor, then looked at me. When he saw me turning toward the elevator, he shouted, “Justin!”

The next second, Justin spread his arms and blocked my path.

I looked at Justin for two seconds, then turned around and met Damon’s gaze.

“Aria, don’t you have anything to say?” he asked.

“I do.” I curved my lips and shifted my gaze to Claudia’s pitiful face. “Claudia Stone, I have one regret.”

A flash of guilt crossed Claudia's face. She looked at me timidly.

"I regret that I didn't slap you a couple more times earlier."

Damon's face darkened instantly. The veins on his forehead bulged. "Is that what you wanted to say?!"

"Yes. That's exactly what I wanted to say. Now that I've said it, can I leave?" I answered calmly.

His hand hanging by his side clenched into a fist so tightly that it made a cracking sound.

"Damon, don't be angry. Aria was just upset and pushed me. She didn't mean it. It's my fault for not standing steady..." The ever-understanding Claudia quickly made excuses for me.

"Upset? She pushed you to the ground and somehow it's your fault?" Damon let out a cold snort. "Hah, I think she just can't change her ways!"

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Damon's POV

Claudia grabbed my arm, gave me this sad little pout, and said, "Damon, don't talk about Aria like that... It's really my fault. I heard Grandpa Walter wasn't feeling well, so I wanted to bring him some vitamins and stuff to the hospital. But I had no idea Ana would be there today. The second she saw me, she got all upset and said she was leaving. Grandpa Walter tried everything to get her to stay, but she wouldn't listen. In the end, he had no choice but to ask me to come back another time."

"I trust what I saw with my own eyes. You don't have to explain for her." I patted her hand to calm her down.

Claudia dropped her head, half-leaning against my shoulder. "I guess I get why Aria feels that way. She used to really like you, and now that we're together... seeing me next to you probably stings."

"It's just..."

She looked at Aria with red-rimmed eyes. “I just don’t know what I did wrong. Aria, if you don’t want to see me, fine, I can leave. But why did you have to throw out the gift I brought for Grandpa Walter? And why corner me here and yell at me?”

Aria stared at her without saying a word. She shook her head slightly and let out a cold laugh. “Well, Claudia, I’ve got to hand it to you. You’re a world-class expert at playing the victim.”

“Alright, that’s enough, Aria, Is everything Claudia said true?” I cut her off, angry.

Aria looked at me and froze for a second. “Well? Explain yourself,” I pushed, glaring at her.

“Explain? I don’t owe you an explanation.” With that, she turned to walk away.

What’s up with her? Rhein asked. She used to jump at the chance to clear things up. Why’s she acting like this?

“Since you’ve already decided I did all that stuff, why keep asking? It doesn’t matter if I’m guilty or innocent. You can’t wake someone who’s pretending to be asleep-everyone knows that.” Aria’s voice was surprisingly calm. No disappointment. No sadness.

Then she pressed the elevator button and got into the first one that opened.

I stood there, watching her coldly, until the doors slid shut and I couldn’t see her face anymore.

What does she mean by that? Rhein paced, his tail dropping. She’s leaving! Go after her and ask!

“Damon...” Claudia tugged my arm, bit her lip, and gave me this look-all soft and dreamy. That snapped me back to reality.

“Justin, take Claudia to get some scans, make sure she’s not hurt. I’m not going to see Grandpa today” turned to Claudia. “Something came up at the company. I’ve gotta go.”

vator that was still on this floor and hit the close button.

name from outside.

R Chapter

My chest felt tight and restless, like I needed to blow off steam. So I pulled out my phone to text Tim and Marcus about grabbing drinks. But before I could hit send, a call from Justin came in.

“What? You’re saying Ronan Grayson went into a coma because of a drug reaction? A few days ago?” I asked as I listened.

“Yes, Mr. Hawthorne... It happened five days ago, early in the morning. He woke up around eleven a.m.”

Five days ago? Isn’t that the same day Aria was supposed to meet you at the courthouse? Rhein perked

So... that day, she really didn’t stand me up on purpose?

ow.”

he steering wheel tighter, staring at the bright crosswalk ahead. I thought back to what I’d said ne that day.

ught about how Aria hadn’t even tried to explain anything at the hospital just now. That empty my chest got even stronger.

short honk came from behind me. “The light’s green!” someone yelled out their window.

ed out of it, hit the gas, and drove home.

little black cat poked its head out from under the shoe cabinet. Its bright green eyes locked on me, like it ecognized me. Then it padded over and rubbed against my leg, purring.

grabbed it by the scruff and lifted it up.

I hadn’t been home in a month. This stray, once small enough to fit in my palm, had grown a lot.

“You’ve got more loyalty than she does.”

“Meow!”

The kitten squirmed and struggled.

After sitting for a while, I grabbed my car keys in one hand and the cat in the other, then headed out.

Amy came back with groceries for dinner. The second she opened the door, she almost ran into me. She froze, then glanced at the cat in my hand.

“Mr. Hawthorne, are you going out?”

“Yeah. Don’t bother making dinner for me.”

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Aria’s POV

After leaving the hospital, took a cab straight back to my apartment. I collapsed onto the couch, opened a food delivery app, found a place with good reviews, and placed an order. Then I dragged myself to my home office and started catching up on work emails, preparing to go back to the office tomorrow.

The doorbell rang.

I was in the middle of typing a response to a client when I heard it. I glanced at the time in the bottom-right corner of my screen.

It had only been ten minutes since I ordered. That was way too fast!

I didn’t think much of it. The bell rang again, so I got up and opened the door.

Nobody was there. Just an empty hallway. I looked left, then right... still nothing.

Did I imagine it?

Just as I was about to close the door and head back inside, I heard a faint rustling sound from around the corner of the quiet hallway.

My hand tightened on the doorknob. Images of news stories about women living alone being attacked flashed through my mind. My heart started racing.

“Meow.”

A cat meowed, and my whole body tensed up.

Two more meows, followed by a thump, like something had been knocked over.

I took a deep breath and crept toward the corner, trying to meow back. “Meow?”

“Meow.”

For a second, I thought I was hearing things.

A cardboard delivery box lay half-tipped over. The tape on the opening had been partly clawed off by tiny cat paws, but the hole was still too small for the kitten's body. Only its fuzzy head poked out, squirming frantically.

I knew this cat. It was the same stray black kitten I'd run into the night before my business trip.

"How did you get here?"

Astrid had said it disappeared. Seeing it struggle, I quickly crouched down and tore the tape off

The second the kitten was free, it bolted into my apartment and hid in a corner. It moved so fast I couldn't

even react.

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picked up the box and examined it. No writing. No label. Nothing.

+25 Ponte

The kitten crouched in the corner, watching me with its little green eyes. Then it crept closer and settled

down.

I tried to reach for it. This time it didn't run away immediately. It seemed less skittish than before.

"Did a neighbor take you in for a while? crouched next to it and gently scratched behind its ears.

"But the apartment across the hall is empty. Nobody lives there," I said to the cat.

The kitten inched even closer, looking at me with big, hopeful eyes.

"Are you hungry?" The cat pressed its head into my palm and started purring.

soft fur brushed back and forth against my hand. I felt my heart melting.

"Hold on. Let me see if I have something you can eat." I stood up and headed to the kitchen.

remembered Astrid had left some cat treats in the cabinet. There should still be some dried chicken

inside.

Found them!

Just as I pulled out the treats, my phone rang from the table.

I tore open the package with one hand and answered the video call with the other.

“Aria, please don’t tell me that’s what you’re having for dinner!” Astrid’s eyes went wide when she saw the chicken strip in my hand. She put on a mock-horrified expression.

“No.” I laughed. “That’s not for me.”

“Oh, do you have company?”

“Yeah, I guess you could say that.” I nodded, playing along.

I

Astrid frowned. “Wait! You didn’t sneak a guy in there while I was gone, did you?!”

“Astrid, what goes on inside your head all day?” I nearly cracked up at how ridiculous she was being.

“Okay, okay. Let me show you who came over.” flipped the camera around, On screen appeared a little black cat, sitting with its paws tucked neatly beneath it.

Astrid froze. “That cat looks so familiar... Is that the one we saw last time?”

“Yep,” I said, breaking the chicken into tiny pieces on the floor.

The kitten sniffed the air, crawled forward, and started eating happily.

“So the ‘company’ you meant is this cat?” Astrid watched the kitten munching away on screen. “Did you bring it home? I went downstairs looking for it practically every day and never found it. Then the second you come back, it shows up.”

“No

very box and left it at my door.” I gently stroked the kitten’s head.

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Astrid's alarm bells went off. "Did you see who dropped it off? I've heard about creeps using cute animals to lure people, and then... no, Aria, forget the cat for a second. Lock your door right now. I'm calling my brother to check the security footage. Aria, are you even listening to me?" Astrid frowned, her voice getting sharper when she saw how calm I was.

"I know you're worried someone might be up to something." I turned the camera back to my face. "I didn't see who left the cat, but before I came out, I looked around. There was nobody there. And this place has tight security. What you're talking about basically can't happen here."

"Still, someone randomly dropping a cat at your door is just way too weird!" Astrid still sounded deeply suspicious.

I smiled but didn't argue.

"Anyway, Aria, until I get back, please be careful," Astrid said, still worried.

"Don't worry. I'll protect both the cat and myself," I said firmly.

Astrid nodded. "Aria, why don't you just adopt it?" she suggested. "Whoever sent it to you... we don't know what their deal is... but the fact that you ran into it again has to mean something. You two have a connection. And while I'm away, you never go out much anyway. A cat would be good company."

I thought about it, then reached out to touch the kitten. It had fallen asleep after eating. When I touched it, it rolled onto its side, grabbed my wrist with both paws, and licked my hand without even waking up.

Those little barbs on its tongue scraped against my skin. It stung a little, but didn't hurt.

"Okay," I said, turning to look at Astrid, who was practically bouncing with excitement on the screen.

Astrid clapped her hands. "Awesome! Hey, Aria, what should we name her? Since you're adopting her, she needs a name!"

I carefully stroked her head. "Let's call her... Nina."

"Nina?" Astrid blinked.

I watched the kitten curl up on the floor. "Yeah. She's got a new home now. No more being abandoned, no more going hungry. It's a new life. And me... I'm about to start my own new life too. We both have something to look forward to. Nina means 'hope' in Spanish. So that's her name. Nina." –

Vote

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Damon's POV

I parked the car not far from her building.

I half-leaned against the door and looked up at the lit windows of her apartment.

Pain stung my fingertip.

I dropped the burned-out cigarette and ground it under my shoe. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw the scratches on the back of my hand ... from when I'd shoved that kitten into the box and it fought back. The blood had already dried.

"Good riddance," I muttered. "One less problem to deal with." Like her. Both of them showed up out of nowhere, caused nothing but trouble, then acted like I was the bad guy.

You really feel better now? I doubt it, Rhein said lazily, his tail swishing calmly.

You deserved it. The cat was fine where it was, yet you had to drag it out. Of course it scratched you.

I ignored him, pulled out a cigarette, and lit it. The smoke drifted into the night air, disappearing like something you can't hold onto.

"This is so messed up," I muttered.

You should be relieved, Rhein rumbled in my head. You thought she'd show up at the courthouse, sign the papers quietly, and you'd be free of her. But she didn't. And you? You were happy for maybe three seconds before you started pretending to be mad.

I wasn't pretending, I growled.

Your pulse tells a different story. Rhein's presence pressed closer, more insistent. She didn't come. She didn't leave. She's still here. Still yours. Ours.

Damn it. I punched the car door. I hate her. You know that. Not just her-her whole family. That construction accident at Grayson's site killed Liam. I still dream about my friend lying in a pool of blood.

What you are is afraid, Rhein snarled, his voice dropping to something low and dangerous. Not of her. Of her leaving. Of that bond breaking. You know what happens then. A mate isn't paper you can shred. It's not human logic. It's two halves of one thing. She's incomplete. You're incomplete. Only together does the wolf settle.

That's insane. Me, afraid of her leaving?

You need her, Rhein growled, primal and certain. Every time she gets close, your blood runs hot. Every time she cries, something in your chest tears open. Every time she says she doesn't love you anymore, you want to rip everything apart until she takes it back. I feel it all. You can't control it. It's what we are.

I took a long drag and exhaled hard, smoke burning my throat. Shut up. This stupid fate. This bond. This...

her.

Rhein wouldn't let up. You should be grateful she hasn't signed yet. Grateful she's still bound to you. Grateful

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she hasn't disappeared completely.

Stop. Just stop. You know I'm losing it.

+25 Paints

You lost it a long time ago, Rhein rumbled: The first day you caught her scent in the snow, you were already

gone.

What good does any of this do now?

None. But I don't lie. I know her. I'll always know her.

I crushed the cigarette under my heel and closed my eyes.

Goddess. She really is driving me insane.

Aria's POV

The days flew by. I kept up with projects, checked on the Pacific Design Competition now and then, went home to the cat, looked through Astrid's travel photos.

Before I knew it, winter arrived.

At Skydreame Design Institute, a guy from the office walked in holding a bag of milk tea. "One for each of you!"

Peggy jumped up, pushed through the crowd, and grabbed two cups. She set one in front of me.

"Aria, stop tweaking that drawing and drink something."

I'd just said thanks to Peggy when a voice came from the office doorway. "Who's Grayson?"

I hadn't even looked up yet. "That's me."

A delivery guy walked in carrying a huge bouquet. He set it down in front of me and pulled out a receipt. "Miss Grayson, these are for you. Please sign."

I was confused for a second, then signed.

"Wow! A giant bouquet of pink roses!" Peggy's eyes went wide as she checked them out. The flowers took up almost all the leftover space on both our desks, filling the air with a nice smell.

Other people in the office crowded around.

"That's gotta be a hundred roses! Aria, who sent them?"

"Aria's single ... obviously it's a secret admirer!"

"No way. Sending something this big right off the bat means something's going on. Aria, tell the truth... are you secretly dating someone?"

Everyone talked over each other. I felt like I was drowning in noise.

I snapped out of it and tried to find the delivery guy to ask who sent them, but he was already gone.

Peggy noticed my blank stare and waved the others off. "Okay, everyone-don't you have drawings to

fuwah? Sites to visit? Go on, get busy, or Dana will be out here making all of you miserable."

*Aria, what are you thinking? About who sent the flowers? Peggy leaned in, curious.

“No, I’m thinking sneezed” what to do with them.”

Peggy’s voice shot up, but then she caught herself and whispered, “You don’t want them? Why not? They’re so pretty! If my guy bought me these, robe smiling in my sleep!”

“I’m allergic to pollen.”

Peggy’s voice perked up. “Wait-so this guy is trying to win you over, but he doesn’t even know you’re allergic to flowers?

“Nope

“Hey, there’s a card Peggy spotted it, pulled it from the bouquet, and handed it to me.

One sentence. Printed. Happy Birthday.

“Aria, it’s your birthday?

Even I was caught off guard when I read it. I checked the date. Oh. Right.

Time had gone by so fast, I’d forgotten my own birthday.

Peggy looked at the card, then rolled her eyes. “I don’t know whether to praise this guy or curse him out. He sends a birthday gift, but not only does he not know you have allergies... he doesn’t even sign his name.”

I tossed the card in the trash. My nose was already starting to feel weird from being near the flowers for too long.

I picked up the bouquet and started walking out. Peggy stopped me. “Aria, you’re going to throw them away?

“Give them to me. You’re allergic. I’ll toss them for you,” Peggy said.

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Damon's POV

Justin pulled over to the side of the road outside the design institute. The delivery guy came out and walked toward the car.

"Delivered?" I pulled out a stack of bills and held it out to him, my voice cold.

The guy took the money with both hands, nodding like crazy. "Thank you, sir! Don't worry... I handed the flowers to Miss Grayson myself. No mistake about it."

"You can go." I waved him off.

He hopped on his bike and sped away.

But then... a flash of bright pink caught my eye....

The flowers I'd just sent in were being carried back out by some woman I didn't recognize.

And then.

That woman walked straight to the trash can.

The next second... thud... the bouquet got tossed in like garbage. No hesitation.

What?! She threw them away? What is her problem? Rhein sat up, growling.

My heart stuttered for a second. My fists clenched so hard my knuckles cracked.

Justin, in the passenger seat, glanced at me in the rearview mirror. His eyes were full of fear.

After a long pause, Justin stammered, "Alpha, should we go to..."

My phone rang.

Justin glanced at the caller ID and picked up.

A moment later, his face went serious. He hung up and turned to me. "Alpha, Miss Stone collapsed at

home."

I let out a long breath, paused, then said, "Drive to Claudia's place."

By the time we reached Claudia's, apartment, her doctor had already examined her. He closed his medical bag and stood to face me. "Mr. Hawthorne, the head wound has been properly treated. It's not severe. With some rest, she'll be fine. And no, there won't be any scarring."

I nodded. "Thanks. Justin, see him out."

Justin led the doctor out and quietly closed the door behind him.

Claudia was half-sitting against the headboard, her eyes wet. "Damon... I'm sorry. Did I cause you more

trouble?"

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"No. Don't overthink it. I told you... I'll make it up to you as much as I can." Flooked at her. "And don't worry. I gave the Stone family three hundred million. They won't bother you again."

Claudia lifted her head, her shimmering eyes meeting mine. A small smile curved her lips. In the low light, she looked both fragile and tempting.

"Thank you, Damon," she whispered.

"I'll get going. You rest and heal." I looked away and turned to leave.

But Claudia froze. Her smile froze too. Tears welled up in her eyes.

"Why..."

She gripped the blanket, then suddenly threw it off and lunged at me, grabbing my hand.

Her move was so fast it actually startled me. I reached out to steady her by instinct.

"Darnon, I... I'm dizzy." Claudia pressed her hand to her forehead, looking like she might pass out.

Right as she started to fall, I caught her around the waist and lifted her.

"Damon..."

Claudia opened her eyes in my arms. She looped her arms around my neck, her gaze soft and smoky. She tilted her head up, so close that if I just lowered mine a little, I'd be kissing her.

Her chest rose and fell. Her neck arched back. Her eyes were full of sweet longing.

Before she could react, I took two long steps and set her down on the bed. I pulled her hands off me and said, “Claudia, you’re still hurt. Don’t get up.”

I started to turn away. But Claudia bit her lip, sat up, and wrapped her arms around my waist from behind. “Damon, don’t go. Stay with me, okay? I’m scared... being alone.”

I was about to say something when she suddenly unzipped her dress. It fell open, her bare body on full display. She knelt on the bed and reached for my pants.

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Damon’s POV

I grabbed the hand that was working on my zipper. “Claudia. Do you even know what you’re doing?”

+25 Pos

“i know.” Claudia, eyes red, pressed her naked body against me. “Damon, I love you... This should’ve happened two years ago. Damon, I want you.”

She didn’t wait. Her hand groped at my crotch.

A strange, sweet smell drifted into my nose. For some reason, my body started heating up.

Claudia puckered her lips and leaned in. I jerked my head away and swallowed hard, trying to shove down the fire building inside me. “Claudia. Calm down.”

She raised her other hand, her pale fingers landing on my lips. Then she traced little circles on my chest. “Damon, don’t you want me? I know you do. Damon... don’t hold back. I want to give myself to you.”

The heat came on too fast, too sudden. This wasn’t normal.

“Claudia, did you use some kind of...”

Before I could finish, she threw herself at me, mumbling, “I knew you’d like it, Damon.”

I fought to keep control!. My c**k was already hard, aching. I forced my voice low. "Enough. You're hurt. You need to rest."

I shoved her arms off, turned, and walked out fast.

Justin saw me storming out and came up to meet me. But as soon as he got close, he sniffed the air around me. "Alpha... that smell on you..."

I yanked at my tie, breathing heavy. "Get in the car."

"Yes, sir."

Justin hurried to open the door. "Alpha, do you need to go the hospital?"

I dropped into the back seat, fists clenched, eyes shut. The restlessness inside was getting worse. A fire was racing through my veins with nowhere to go.

"...Aria's apartment." I forced the words out through gritted teeth.

Aria's POV

I worked late, didn't get back to my apartment until seven. I stepped into the elevator, leaned against the wall, and scrolled through a dozen videos Astrid had sent. Her excited voice filled the little space.

I sent her a "got it" emoji, then stepped out of the elevator and waited outside the door, taking a moment to collect the little gift Noah had sent me.

I opened the exquisite box and felt a flicker of surprise-inside lay a batch of out-of-print wolf herbs. A string of ancient Wolf script was printed across the wrapping paper. I'd picked up a little of it studying with

A

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Joshua, and I could make out roughly three words: potency, anesthetic, defense.

+25 Porns

"There was a birthday card tucked inside, too: Happy birthday! These are defensive wolf herbs-they'll

protect you when you're in danger. Your life matters more than any showy thing. Maybe a gift like this suits you better than flashy, useless flowers.

I smiled faintly, a small warmth spreading through my chest.

Not long ago, I'd mentioned to Noah in passing that the news had been reporting criminal rogue wolves or the loose lately. I hadn't expected him to keep it in mind.

After I opened the door, I set the box and the card carefully on the table. Beneath the white crescent-shaped spray bottle hung a delicate necklace-I slipped it around my neck.

Nina was already waiting in the living room. The moment she saw me, she came bounding over, tail wagging, meowing.

I crouched down and scratched her head. "Hey, Nina. How was your day?"

Nina rubbed against my hand sweetly, her round eyes blinking. "Meow."

The apartment was dark. I slipped into my slippers and fumbled for the light switch in the blackness. I heard Nina still meowing by the door, so without looking back, I said softly, "Nina, come inside."

"Meow meow meow!"

Nina arched her back, tail straight up, and let out several loud cries.

My fingers had just found the light switch. I was about to flip it when I stopped. I turned around. "Nina ... mmph..."

A tall figure... backlit by the faint light from the hallway... appeared right in front of me.

A bad feeling surged up in me.

Could a rogue wolf have broken in?

Then a big, cool hand grabbed my wrist and shoved me against the shoe cabinet. He dipped his head and crushed his lips onto mine. Rough. Demanding.

My eyes blew wide. My brain went blank.

I fought with everything I had, but he was way too strong. No matter how hard I pushed, he didn't budge.

I clamped my teeth shut. I could feel how hot his body was. Like a piece of iron fresh out of the fire.

Nina seemed to sense the danger too. She ran around our feet, meowing nonstop, trying to hook her claws into his pant leg.

One of his hands was enough to pin me down. Feeling me resist, he used the other to grab my waist and dug his fingers into the soft spot there.

“Ah!”

The pain made me gasp. He took the chance to push past my teeth and lick deep into my mouth. No room

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to escape.

Somments

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+25 Posts

Aria's POV

My body went rigid. Weakness spread through me. My eyes started burning.

And in that close space, I smelled it.

That cool, woodsy scent... the one that was purely Damon. But underneath it, there was something else. Something that didn't belong to him.

Sweet. Soft. A hint of gardenia.

Hers. Claudia's.

That smell went up my nose, down my throat, straight into my already broken heart.

He'd held her before coming here. Kissed her. Maybe done more.

And now he was touching me with those same hands. Kissing me with that same mouth.

Disgusting.

Shame poured over me like hot asphalt, coating my whole body.

“...Damon?”

“It’s me.” His veins bulged. His heavy gaze landed on my face for a second, then he grabbed my jaw and kissed me again.

Claudia’s scent hit me all over again.

I don’t know where I found the strength, but I shoved him back.

“Damon, you’re insane!” Fear turned into rage, burning in my chest.

I looked at him, full of disappointment, my whole body shaking uncontrollably.

In those few seconds, horrible images flashed through my mind... home invasion, r**e, urder ... but I never expected it to be him doing this to me.

What made it even worse was that woman’s smell clinging to him. Unwashed. Unmistakable.

“You touched her.” My voice trembled. “You reek of her ... how dare you... how dare you humiliate me like this?”

I took a deep breath, forcing myself to stay calm. I fumbled in the dark and flipped on the light.

I looked at his flushed face. His bulging veins. His bloodshot eyes. I said each word slowly. “Damon. Get

out.”

He didn’t move. He was fighting something... I could see it. He stepped closer, his eyes full of that Alpha hunger and aggression. That look made my stomach drop and my spine go cold.

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His face was too red. Veins popped on his forehead. His breath came hot and fast.

“Damon, you’ve been drugged... you...”

26 Panty

He strode over, grabbed my throat roughly, and forced my head up. He kissed me again. His other hand pinned my wrist, pushing me back toward the couch. He shoved me down, pressing his whole weight on top of me. His lips left mine and traveled down, sucking at my collarbone.

A jolt of electricity shot through my body. Talmost arched up, turning my head away.
“...Damon, don’t... I can smell her on you... don’t touch me...”

He couldn’t hear me.

I had almost no strength left to fight. My cheeks burned against my will. But I kept trying.
“Damon...”

His grip on my chest suddenly tightened.

“Ah... no! Don’t! Please ...” My breathing got heavier. Shame wrapped around me like a net. I clung to the last bit of my sanity and screamed:

“Damon! You can’t do this to me! We’re divorced!”

My eyes were wet. I repeated it, my voice cracking into a sob. “You can’t just do this to me...”

“Looks like you forgot.” He stopped moving and narrowed his eyes. “We haven’t officially signed the papers yet.”

My whole body went stiff.

He lowered his head, his breath hot against my ear. “Mrs. Hawthorne, need me to remind you? As long as we’re still legally married, you still have... duties. A wife’s duties.”

“Damon...”

He kissed me again. Not gentle. Not testing. Just pure, raw need.

I bit my lip and sobbed, taking it. In my ears, his low, husky voice mixed with the smell of Claudia that made me want to throw up.

“...Aria. Give yourself to me.”

“No-” I shoved at him with every ounce of strength I had.

But Damon’s powerful arm clamped down hard on my shoulder.

And worse-the Alpha pressure.

Under the weight of it, I could barely move.

With the last of my strength, I yanked the herb vial from around my neck, aimed it at Damon, and pressed down on the spray.

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 108

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Aria's POV

I slept for ten hours. Didn't wake up until four in the afternoon.

+25 Paint

The second I opened my eyes, my whole body felt like it had been taken apart and put back together wrong. Every move made me wince and suck in air. Then the memories from the night before started creeping back.

Yesterday, Damon breathed in the herbs and sank into a deep sleep.

I dragged his tall, heavy frame onto the couch, forcing my exhausted body through it.

Then I set about cleaning up the wreckage scattered across the whole apartment.

It was supposed to be my birthday-a day I could spend in peace. Instead, Damon had worn me out completely.

When I unlocked and opened the bedroom door, the sight in front of me left me speechless.

Damon-the Alpha of the Silvermoon Pack, the favored son of the wolf race-was actually wearing my purple apron, carrying a tray of breakfast.

I froze, staring blankly at the man, my mind gone completely empty.

Hearing my voice, Nina immediately left Damon's feet. She trotted over and let out a soft, sweet little "meow."

I'd assumed Damon would have left long ago-after all, this hadn't exactly been a pleasant experience for

him.

I glanced at Nina's bowl... it was full of kibble.

And...

After living with Nina for a while, I knew she wasn't friendly with just anyone. When Peggy came over once to pick up some documents, Nina hid under the couch and wouldn't come out no matter how much I

called.

But that same shy cat had just been rubbing against Damon's palm.

That meant Nina knew him.

Something clicked. I turned back to Damon and said, my voice raspy, "That night... it was you. You left her at my door, didn't you?"

Nina noticed I wasn't petting her like usual. She stood up and tapped my calf with her paw, testing

I was only wearing a thin dress. Nina's claws weren't sharp, but they still stung a little when they touched my skin. And since my skin is sensitive, even a light scratch left faint red marks on my leg.

Damon got up, grabbed Nina by the scruff, and lifted her.

was me."

Hearing that answer, my heart sank. My hand at my side curled into a fist. "Why?"

Damon watched the kitten squirm and struggle. "She was a troublemaker."

"Meow!" Nina seemed to understand the insult and let out an annoyed cry.

I watched her fight back, and for some reason, my mind flashed to myself last night... struggling, powerless.

For a second, I saw myself in that little cat.

And I suddenly understood why Damon had dumped her on me.

Because...

+25 Pou

In his eyes, I was no different from this cat. Something he could take or leave. Something that didn't

matter.

“You’re hurting her.” I don’t know where I found the courage, but I stepped forward and took Nina from Damon’s hands. I held her close, gently calming her down. “Shh, Nina. It’s okay. You’re okay.”

Damon narrowed his eyes. “You named her Nina?”

I didn’t look up. My voice stayed flat. “You gave her to me. That means you’re not her owner anymore. What I name her is none of your business, Mr. Hawthorne.”

Damon’s POV

Mr. Hawthorne.

Fine.

Using a name that distant to push the space between us wider.

She’d better not forget-we aren’t officially divorced yet!

My wolf cut in mockingly. She made you sleep the whole night on the couch, my mate. Now there’s an experience you’ve never had before. And here I thought your body had only ever touched the finest mattress money could buy.

I said in a low voice, “About yesterday-”

The word sorry wouldn’t come out.

My whole life, no one had ever made me apologize.

I’d gotten up this morning and made Aria breakfast-that was my way of saying I was sorry. She should be able to understand that.

But from start to finish, the only time Aria reacted at all was that one instant she saw me in the apron.

After that, eve

ent to Nina.

She treated me like air.

It stung. Is a cat really more important than me?

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 109

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Damon's POV

Once she'd finished soothing the cat, she stood, her back to me, not sparing me a single glance. "Mr. Hawthorne, you're back from your trip. May I come Monday morning to move out the things I left at your house? I wouldn't want to get in the way of your relationship with Miss Claudia."

My chest got so tight I couldn't breathe.

"Is that really how you feel? Aria, you want me to sleep with someone else?"

Hearing those words come out of her mouth made me see red.

She opened her mouth, but it was like something was stuck in her throat. Nothing came out.

"Answer me, damn it!"

I lunged at her, grabbed her chin, and forced her to look at me.

Her face went pale. She wrenched her head away, and her voice rang out loud and clear:

"Yes!"

"Damon, we're getting divorced. I'm not your wife anymore. I won't be fulfilling any more 'wifely duties'- and as for your offense yesterday, I'm willing to pretend it never happened."

"Isn't being with Claudia good for you? Isn't that what you wanted all along?"

"Two years ago was a mistake. Now we have a chance to fix it. Why wouldn't we? Just let me go. Let's both get back on the right track."

Every word was a knife. But I couldn't tell... was she stabbing me, or herself?

I stared at her coldly, trying to find something in her eyes.

Doubt? Regret? Even a tiny bit of hesitation?

But after a long moment... there was nothing.

Her eyes were like dead water. Flat. Empty.

And then it hit me...

She didn't look at me like she loved me anymore.

She didn't love me?

No way.

Wasn't she supposed to... love me forever? Ever since she married me two years ago, wasn't she always looking at me with those hopeful eyes, waiting for me to notice her, to come home, to give her even a scrap of kindness?

How could she just... stop?

Or had someone else taken her from me? Noah? That detestable Alpha of the Whitemoon Pack?!

"Damon..." She got nervous when I didn't say anything.

What was she afraid of? That I wouldn't agree to the divorce?

"Monday's no good," I heard myself say.

"Then when works for you? I can..."

I almost laughed from how mad I was. "Aria. Where's your conscience?" I cut her off.

She blinked, frowning. "...What?"

25 Posty 12

"Grandpa's in the hospital because of our divorce. He hasn't even been discharged yet. And you're that desperate to sign the papers? What's the rush? You want to marry Noah Hargreaves that badly?"

I didn't know why I said it. But seeing her look at me with zero love in her eyes... it made me want to trap her by my side. I couldn't tell if it was possessiveness, or pride, or something else.

"You claim Grandpa's like family to you. So this is your idea of respect?"

Her eyes went wide. Her hands balled into fists. "Damon, not everyone is like you... blind and heartless!"

Blind and heartless. Only Grandpa had ever said that about me. Now her too.

I let out a cold laugh. “Anyone can talk a good game. If you really cared about Grandpa, you’d know now is not the time for divorce.”

She had no comeback for that.

“We’ll get the divorce when Grandpa’s out of the hospital and the doctors say he’s fine.” My voice left no room for argument.

“Don’t worry. The moment he’s in the clear, I’ll sign. But until then—stay away from that Noah.”

Then I stormed off. At the door, I still couldn’t resist turning back to snarl at her: “If you don’t want the breakfast, throw it out! Just pretend I made it for nothing!”

Bang—I slammed the door shut behind me.

My wolf let out a sigh. Why do you always have to make Aria sad?

Hospital room.

A few specialists were gathered around Grandpa, running tests. Finally, they gave their verdict. One of them turned to me on the couch. “Mr. Hawthorne, the old Alpha’s vitals are all within normal range. He can be discharged.”

Grandpa sat on the bed, leaning on his cane. The second he heard “discharged,” he pushed himself up. couldn’t wait to leave. “Finally. Take me home.”

I could tell ... after almost a month in here, with nowhere to go and annoying people pretending to care

< Chapter 106

about him, he was already regretting faking being sick.

—“Give my grandpa another month. Do a full body scan. I want more accurate data,” I said slowly.

The specialists were about to leave. They paused, then nodded. “Of course, Mr. Hawthorne. No problem.”

Grandpa was almost out the door. When he heard that, his salt-and-pepper eyebrows shot up. “No problem? I have a problem! I’m fine. Why would I stay? I’m not staying! Don’t you dare re-admit me! I dare anyone to try!”

“Well...” The specialists looked uncomfortable. They glanced at Grandpa, then at me.

I didn't even look at Grandpa. "Justin. Take them to do the paperwork."

Justini

Gra

the back of his neck nervously, then led the specialists out.

suming. "Damon, what the hell do you mean by this?!"

thinking of your health. Staying here, getting a more thorough checkup... it's good for you."

er swept a deep, searching look over me. "I'm old, Damon-but I know what's on your mind." s in business doesn't mean you'll win in love."

aze was sharp, as if to see straight through me. "Never mind-let's not talk about you and Aria. How the negotiations with the Whitemoon Pack going?"

They're still ongoing." My expression stayed calm; it would be hard for anyone to find a crack in it.

The truth was, they weren't going well at all. Whitemoon kept stalling, refusing to engage with the wolves we'd sent out to handle relations.

Whitemoon is a thorny problem. And Noah... there's no way he got close to Aria and me without a motive.

Claudia's POV

Damon left.

My body was on fire, melting from the inside. I bit my lip and curled up on the bed, trying to take care of it myself, but the heat only got worse. Right when I didn't know what to do, the doorbell rang.

Darnon came back? He couldn't stay away after all!

I threw on a robe and ran to the door, barefoot, happy.

The second I opened it, my heart dropped. It wasn't Damon. It was my pathetic ex-husband, Charlie.

Before I could even feel disappointed, he saw my flushed face, my hazy eyes. He gave me that smug smile. "Claudia, looks like you're waiting for someone."

I didn't have the energy for small talk. The moment he touched me, all my restraint snapped. I pretended he was Damon. I pressed against him, wrapped around him, begged him.

Charlie wasn't a saint. He never turned down a gift that landed in his lap.

We rolled onto the floor, the couch, the bed, the bathroom. He moved like he always had during our marriage ... practiced, familiar. I moaned and called his name, but in my head, I was thinking about

Damon.

Where did Damon even go? He'd breathed in my incense ... that much of it ... there was no way he could fight it. Who would he go to?

Was he with Aría? That name bit me like a snake.

No. Impossible. Absolutely not. But my body tensed up without my permission. Charlie noticed. He pushed harder, I squeezed my eyes shut and tried to shove that face out of my head.

After a few grunts, Charlie lay back, satisfied, and pulled me against him. His finger traced lazy circles on my chest. His voice had that boring, competitive edge guys get. "So, me or Damon? Who's better?"

"...You." I leaned into him and said it softly.

He smirked, "Guess Damon's not all that."

That comment reminded me. I sat up straight. "Charlie. Track someone for me."

"Who?" He asked lazily.

"Aria Grayson. I need to know where she was last night. Who she saw." I ground out the words.

Charlie wasn't eager, but after I raised the offer to half a million and promised to let him crash at my place. he sent me a video that same night.

Security footage from outside Aria's apartment building.

In the video, that familiar Maybach pulled up slowly. Damon got out and walked inside.

+25 Ports

e never came back out.

They spent the whole night there.

I gripped my phone so hard my chest felt like it would explode. Aria Grayson. I wanted to chew that name to pieces.

I almost called Damon to confront him. But I stopped myself. No. I couldn't let him know I was spying on him

Jealousy wrapped around my heart like poison ivy, squeezing tighter and tighter.

I was going insane. If I could, I'd kill her myself.

Then my phone lit up. An unknown number.

I hesitated, then answered. The voice on the other end was distorted, robotic. "Is this Claudia?"

"Who is this?"

"I know what you did at Grayson Group two years ago."

My blood turned to ice.

"You're crazy! Wrong number!"

"Joshua Grayson is looking into the accident. He's already found out you worked on that project. Soon, he'll know what you did back then."

That was it. My last nerve gave out.

No... that's impossible. I destroyed everything!

The caller hung up.

I dialed back like a maniac, but they'd already turned off their phone and blocked me.

I fell onto the edge of the bed, heart racing. Everything I thought I'd buried forever was surfacing like rot from deep water.

Calm down. I had to stay calm.

Joshua only knew I was involved in the project. He didn't have proof yet. There was still time.

I called Charlie. Paused. Then said, low and cold:

Charlie Take care of someone for me.”

Five hundred million when it’s done

Vote

7 Chapter To

Aria’s POV

Morning.

First rain of winter. Light, steady.

Nina hopped onto the headboard, curled up by my pillow. Soft meow.

I’d had a nightmare, but the second I woke up, the details started fading. All that was left was this heavy sadness stuck in my chest, making it hard to breathe.

“Morning, Nina.”

I pressed my temples, sat up against the headboard, and scooped Nina into my arms. She was warm and soft, like a little ball of cotton that could breathe.

Nina licked the back of my hand and gave a little “meow” back.

After lazing in bed for a bit, I called Walter to check on him.

Strangely, Walter ... who’d sounded so full of energy before... now sounded weak on the phone. He coughed after just a few words, got sleepy, and seemed tired.

I asked the housekeeper about it. He sighed and said, “It’s the sudden temperature drop. With the cold weather, the old Alpha caught a cold, and it triggered some other minor issues.”

“But don’t worry, Luna. The doctor says he just needs to stay in the hospital for observation for about half a year.”

“Half a year?” I was confused.

A cold needs half a year in the hospital?

I still felt uneasy and offered to visit Walter. But both Grandpa and the housekeeper refused at the same time, saying they didn’t want me to catch whatever he had.

I had no choice but to ask the housekeeper to take good care of him.

Nina stretched and interrupted my thoughts, I checked the time... I had a meeting this morning, so I needed to leave early.

After making sure Nina was okay, I grabbed my bag and keys and headed out.

As I opened the door, I noticed a doormat in front of the apartment across the hall. Someone had moved in? No wonder I'd heard moving noises last night in my sleep.

The elevator arrived. I looked away, went down to the garage.

It was drizzling outside. Rain hit the glass roof of the garage, making a soft, crackling sound. I found my car and started it... the engine let out a weird groan and died.

I tried again. Same thing.

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The car was broken. It had been running fine just days ago.

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Frowning, I got out and walked around it twice. Nothing obvious was wrong. So I pulled out my

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 110

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Claudia's POV

Damon left.

My body was on fire, melting from the inside. I bit my lip and curled up on the bed, trying to take care of it myself, but the heat only got worse. Right when I didn't know what to do, the doorbell rang.

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“Charlie. Take care of someone for me.”

“Five hundred million when it’s done.”

Vole

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 111

Aria’s POV

Morning.

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It was drizzling outside. Rain hit the glass roof of the garage, making a soft, crackling sound I found my car and started it... the engine let out a weird groan and died.

I tried again. Same thing.

The car was broken. It had been running fine just days ago.

Frowning, I got out and walked around it twice. Nothing obvious was wrong. So I pulled out my phone to call a ride.

[There are 107 people ahead of you...]

Rainy day. Too many people trying to get rides. If I waited that long, I'd definitely be late.

I decided to walk toward the exit and figure it out on the way. I grabbed my umbrella and headed for the garage exit.

Rain pattered on the umbrella. Tap tap tap. I texted Dana, then checked the ride app again... still 97 people ahead.

"Miss Grayson."

A familiar voice. I looked up... Justin?

I looked behind him. Sure enough, the Maybach was parked right at the exit. Windows rolled up, rain

making the shiny body gleam.

Damon was inside.

“Alpha asks you to get in the car.”

I gripped my umbrella handle. “I’m in a hurry for work. He can call me if he needs something.”

I walked around him and kept going. Justin blocked my way. “I’ll drive you to the design institute. Please get in. Don’t keep Alpha waiting.”

The message was clear... either get in, or nobody goes anywhere.

In the past, I might’ve given in.

But not now.

“Then we’ll just stand here.”

I stayed under my umbrella, my expression cold as I looked at Justin. But my gaze seemed to go right past him, landing on the man sitting in that Maybach.

The rain got heavier.

Maybe it was my imagination... but I felt like Damon was looking back at me.

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 112

Aria’s POV

Beep. Beep beep.

The Maybach was blocking the garage exit. Cars had backed up behind it in a long line. In the rain, the honking was especially sharp, each blast cutting through the air.

A maintenance guy jogged over. But the second he saw Justin, he froze.

Maybe not everyone knew Damon by sight. But Justin ... Damon’s right-hand man ... anyone with any status recognized him.

“Mr. Justin, what’s going on here...” The property manager came up with a nervous smile.

“Per my boss’s request, I’m here to ask Mrs. Hawthorne to get in the car.”

Mrs. Hawthorne.

That word hit my ears like a splinter.

The property manager blinked, his gaze bouncing between me and the Maybach. He muttered to himself, “Wait, the gossip on sss said Mr. Hawthorne was marrying some architect named Claudia... That doesn’t look like her...”

Then his face lit up like he’d just figured something out. He turned to me, all smiles. “Oh, I’m so sorry. I didn’t recognize you, Miss Grayson. I’m the property manager. Smith.”

My eyelid twitched.

Justin had just straight-up announced my relationship with Damon.

“Mr. Smith.” My voice was flat. “I’m not Mrs. Hawthorne.”

Smith froze. He looked at Justin in confusion.

Justin didn’t even flinch. He said it like he was talking about the weather. “Mrs. Hawthorne and Mr. Hawthorne are having a little disagreement.”

Smith’s face immediately lit up with understanding. He scratched the back of his head. “Ah, totally normal. Couples fight. It happens.”

I frowned and shot Justin a glance.

He just stood there with that plastic smile, repeating himself. “Mrs. Hawthorne, Mr. Hawthorne asks you to get in the car.”

Behind us, the honking got louder. Smith clasped his hands, giving me a hopeful grin. “Mrs. Hawthorne, it’s cold and wet out here. The car’s warm. I know you’re mad, but don’t risk getting sick. And look at this line of cars behind you... Maybe get in and talk things over with your husband?”

“You know what they say... no fight survives the night when you share a bed.”

<Chapter 109

Htook a deep breath.

Then I walked toward the Maybach.

+25-Pos

Behind me, I heard dustin exhale in relief and mutter under his breath, “Good job. I’ll mention your name to Mr. Hawthorne.”

The door opened. I got in.

Rain tapped on the roof, soft and scattered. Inside the car was quiet, like another world.

Damon sat on the other side, eyes closed, face blank.

I thought he'd forced me into the car because he had something to say.

But the whole drive to the design institute, the man next to me never opened his eyes. Not one word.

Made me feel kind of stupid for assuming.

The car stopped. Justin turned his head. "Mrs. Hawthorne, we're here."

Mrs. Hawthorne. Here we go again.

"Justin," I said, pushing the door open, my voice calm. "From now on, just call me Miss Grayson."

Before the words even finished, Damon's cold voice came from behind me. "Justin. Didn't I tell you to stop calling her Mrs. Hawthorne?"

Justin immediately apologized. "Sorry, Alpha. It slipped out."

Some kind of connection between Damon and me had been severed by his merciless words.

Who cares about a title like that? I thought. But for some reason, a faint sense of loss lingered in my chest.

That message was for me. His meaning was crystal clear: Justin's words had nothing to do with him. As far as Damon was concerned, I never deserved the title "Mrs. Hawthorne" in the first place.

I grabbed my umbrella, got out, and took a few steps forward Then I stopped.

"...Thanks."

I didn't wait. I walked into the design institute without looking back.

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 113

Chapter 110-

Jenny's POV

Three days ago, I already knew all of this. And I didn't say a word.

"Mr. Grayson, are you heading out?"

I watched him shove his phone into his jacket pocket. His long fingers were already hooked around his car keys. I'd seen that move a hundred times. But today was different.

Today, there was something in his eyes I'd never seen before. Urgency.

"Something came up. Gotta drive out of town. Probably won't be back for a few days. Tell Shawn to clear my schedule for this week."

His voice was low, but every word carried weight. No arguing.

My fingers tightened around the folder in my arms. It let out a tiny crinkle.

"Shawn's not going with you?"

"No, things are too critical right now. We're close to closing the Donald deal, and I can't leave everything hanging. I'm trusting Shawn to hold down the fort while I'm gone."

With that, he strode out of the office on those long legs.

I watched his back, the sharp line of his suit jacket across his shoulders, his spine straight as a knife's edge. He'd always been like this. A blade in its sheath/Quiet. Controlled. Deadly.

But this blade... three days from now, it would break.

I stood there, feeling my heart pound like a drum in my chest.

Three more days.

Exactly seventy-two hours.

Seventy-two hours from now, he'd die on that road back. Well, maybe not die... those people might not want him dead. But they'd make sure he never spoke again.

I bit my lower lip and ran after him.

The hallway was long. The gray carpet swallowed all footsteps. All I could hear was my own breathing. getting faster and faster.

I burst into the stairwell. My heels clacked against the concrete steps, sharp and loud.

... Floor 28.

Floor 27.

Only one thought in my head: stop him. Say something. Even if it's just to look at him one more time.

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Floor 15.

Floor 14.

+25 Ponts

I knew I couldn't change anything. If I opened my mouth and told him the truth, it wouldn't just be him who died. It'd be me. Maybe my whole family.

Every word of that warning that person gave me... I remembered it all.

Floor 14.

Floor 13.

I ran into the underground garage just as the elevator doors were about to close.

I shoved my hand into the gap.

The metal doors pressed against my palm. It hurt so bad I almost screamed. But I didn't pull back. The doors bounced open.

"Are you insane?!"

Joshua yanked me inside. Hard. I slammed right into his chest. His voice was all anger, his eyes like a burning pit.

I caught his smeli... pine and cedar, with a hint of tobacco.

A wave of fear hit me. My face must have been white as paper. He frowned at me, his Adam's apple bobbing. Whatever lecture he'd been about to give, he swallowed it. All he said was, "Be careful next time."

"Sorry." I dropped my head low.

I couldn't look him in the eyes.

Because if I did, I'd cry. And then everything I wasn't supposed to say would come pouring out.

"You ran all the way down here. Did you have something else to tell me?" he asked.

I shook my head. No words came.

"Work problem?"

I shook my head again.

"Someone at the office giving you a hard time?"

I shook my head, my eyes, burning. "Everyone's been really nice to me."

He frowned and glanced at his watch. A tiny movement. But I saw it.

He was in a hurry. Hurrying to go die.

"Then what..." His voice was already getting impatient.

Chapter 11D

threw myself into his arms.

+25 Paints

Wrapped my arms tight around his waist. Buried my face in his chest. Listened to his heart thumping. Once. Twice. Three times.

Just three seconds.

Then I let go.

I tilted my head up and looked at his face... that face I'd secretly stared at a thousand times in the office. High cheekbones. Straight nose. Lips pressed together in a thin line. A jaw sharp as a razor.

"Mr. Grayson," I said, my voice shaking a little. "I'm just... feeling anxious, I wanted you to drive safe."

He looked at me. His gaze went deep, like he was trying to see right through me.

Then he raised his hand. It hung in the air for a second, like he was going to put it on my head.

But it just stopped halfway.

“Okay,” he said.

The elevator doors opened.

He walked out. Didn’t look back.

I stood in the elevator, watching him head for that black car. Watched him open the door. Watched him slide inside.

The engine started. A low sound that echoed through the garage.

It sounded like a countdown.

Seventy-two hours.

No, from this moment... seventy-one hours and fifty-eight minutes.

He turned the wheel and headed for the exit. The headlights #ashed around the corner. Then the dark

swallowed him whole.

I stood there by the elevator, and finally, the tears came.

“I’m sorry.”

I covered my mouth, my voice muffled by my palm.

“Joshua. I’m so sorry.”

Vote

< Chapter 11-

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 114

Aria’s POV

Three days later.

+25 Points 2-

I'd just stepped out of a meeting when my phone lit up with a missed call from Joshua. My heart jumped. I hit redial right away, and he picked up almost instantly.

"Joshua, what's up?"

"Aria, I got it all figured out-the truth about the accident from two years ago, and Claudia too. I even have a USB drive with the key evidence."

I froze right there in the hallway. It took my brain a couple seconds to catch up, and then this huge wave of joy slammed into me. I spun around and started walking fast toward the exit of the design institute. "Where are you? I'm coming to you right now."

"Just finished some stuff and I'm about to drive back," Joshua said, his voice carrying that easy little laugh. "Don't rush. I'll call you again in three hours and we'll head straight to the police station together."

"Okay." My heart was pounding so hard it felt like it wanted to jump out of my chest.

I stood at the entrance of the design institute. Cold wind mixed with tiny raindrops blew in my face, icy and sharp. I held out my hand without thinking, catching a few drops. But deep in my chest, this weird uneasy feeling crept up, reminding me of the nightmare I'd had a few days ago.

"Joshua," I called out quickly, stopping him before he hung up.

"What's wrong?" Joshua sounded confused.

I stayed quiet for a long moment before whispering, "Drive safe, okay? Really careful. I'll be waiting for you."

Joshua let out a soft laugh, his tone warm and steady. "Don't worry. I'll be fine."

came

After we hung up, I stood there in the rain for a while. Peggy came out hugging her arms, looking for me. "Aria, what are you doing standing out here?"

"Watching the rain."

"What's so great about rain?" Peggy stepped beside me, totally puzzled. "You could watch it from inside through the window. Why stand here freezing?"

I blinked, then turned and smiled at her.

She looked even more confused and reached out to feel my forehead. “Why are you smiling? You don’t have a fever. Didn’t you hear what Director Dana said in the meeting? The client wants ten different sets of drawings! Ten! And they need them before work next week! Those jerks are ruining my weekend!”

I pulled her hand away, still smiling. “I’m just happy.”

Peggy’s eyes went wide. She sighed and shook her head, muttering, “That’s it. Designers are all gonna lose

Chapter LL

#eventually. Look, another one’s cracking up!”

+25 Paints

I just kept smiling quietly. In a few hours, when Joshua got back, Dad’s case might finally get a chance to turn around. A little work pressure? It didn’t mean anything compared to that.

The sky grew darker, and the rain got heavier.

Most people had already left the office. Peggy was sprawled on her desk looking like she wanted to die. “I can’t take it anymore. I’m leaving on time today. Those ten drawings can go to hell! Aria, wanna grab pizza tonight?”

I didn’t answer. I kept unlocking my phone screen, staring at the time in the corner. More than three hours had passed. Why hadn’t Joshua called yet?

“Aria!” Peggy slapped my desk when she saw I wasn’t listening.

I jumped, looking up blankly. “Sorry, what did you say?”

“I said let’s go-”

Right then, my phone rang. I shot up from my chair and answered without even looking.

“Joshua, are you back?”

Silence. Then a man’s voice I didn’t recognize. “Is this Aria Grayson?”

“Yes.”

“Joshua Grayson’s sister?”

My heart dropped.

“Miss Grayson, this is Officer Richard with Highway Patrol. I’m sorry to have to tell you this. Your brother was in a serious accident on Slidhill Highway tonight, His vehicle went off the overpass and caught fire.”

He paused. “I’m very sorry. He didn’t make it.”

I don’t remember how I ran out of the office or how many red lights I blew through. Rain hammered the windshield, mixing with my tears until the whole world blurred. There was only one thought my head: get to Slidhill Highway. Joshua had to be there waiting for me.

When I finally reached the accident scene, I just... froze.

Police tape blocked off the whole stretch. Red and blue lights flashed wildly in the rainy night, stabbing my eyes. The air stank of burnt plastic and gasoline. Cold rain couldn’t wash away the smell of death. Not far away, a crane was slowly lifting what was left of a car-nothing but a blackened skeleton, twisted metal gleaming cruelly under the lights.

That was... Joshua’s car.

I couldn’t even see his body.

‘No

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 115

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Aria’s POV

I gripped the car door. My legs went weak. I almost collapsed.

A uniformed officer spotted me and hurried over to hold me up. “You must be Miss Aria Grayson. I’m Officer Richard.”

I clutched his arm like it was the only thing keeping me standing. “Officer Richard, you’re joking, right? My brother... he’s just messing with me...”

Officer Richard stayed quiet. The pity in his eyes said everything. He spoke heavily, “I’m sorry, Miss Grayson. My condolences.”

r

The thin string that had been holding me together snapped the second he said “condolences.”

“That’s impossible!” I screamed, shaking my head hard. “It can’t be! My brother is so careful. He promised he’d drive safe! He promised me! Joshua! Come out! Stop joking with me! Joshua!”

Aria! I can’t smell him anywhere. He’s not here! He must be hiding! Lydia howled inside my head, her grief crashing into mine, almost ripping my sanity apart.

I kept saying I didn’t believe it, but my brain already knew the truth.

Tears poured down. My legs gave out, but Officer Richard and another pair of arms caught me in time.

“Aria!” Noah’s worried voice sounded right beside my ear. He’d gotten the call from the police and rushed

over too.

I turned, my vision blurry, staring at him. “Noah, they said my brother is dead... Tell them it’s not true, okay? Please tell them!”

Noah dropped to one knee and pulled me into a tight hug.

That’s when Officer Richard handed me a evidence bag. Inside was a watch, burned black and warped. “Miss Grayson, take a look at this.”

The moment I saw that watch, my breath stopped.

It was the gift I’d given Joshua when he officially became president of Grayson Group.

My hands shook as I took it. I couldn’t stand anymore and collapsed into the cold muddy water.

Everything started spinning—police lights, rain, worried faces—all blurring and fading away.

Suddenly, the whole world disappeared.

I was standing in warm sunlight. Joshua smiled gently at me, wearing that familiar trench coat. Just like always, he reached out and ruffled my hair.

I choked, reaching for him. “I knew it. I knew you were joking. Let’s go home. You still have the USB drive. We’re supposed to go to the police station...”

Chapter

+25 Pants

He didn’t answer. He just looked at me, eyes full of reluctance and love. “Aria, you’ve grown up. You’re a strong woman now who can stand on her own.”

“What are you talking about? I panicked. His figure started turning transparent. “We promised we’d uncover the truth together. You can’t leave me alone!”

“Listen,” Joshua’s smile stayed warm, but there was a faint sadness in it. “From now on, you have to walk this path by yourself. Promise me you’ll live well and be brave.”

“No! Don’t go! Joshua!” I cried, lunging forward, but I only passed through empty air.

“Brother!”

“Aria!”

Noah’s anxious shout pulled me back to reality. The usual calm was gone from his face.

I clutched the watch so tightly that its sharp edges cut deep into my palm. Blood mixed with rain and dripped down-but I couldn’t feel any pain at all.

“He promised he’d drive safely... He knew I was waiting for him... How could he-”

I couldn’t finish. The pain stole the breath from my lungs. Everything went black before my eyes.

“Aria!” Noah caught me as my legs gave out.

On the edge of consciousness, I felt Noah checking my pulse. “She’s in shock! Get her to a hospital, now!”

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 116

Aria’s POV

Rain was still falling, tapping softly against the hospital window.

I felt like I was floating, looking down at the girl lying in the bed. Her face was pale as paper, completely lifeless-like a porcelain doll with no one inside.

That was me.

A man in a white coat was talking to a familiar figure-Noah, I heard the doctor say, “Alpha, don’t worry. She’s physically fine. It’s just temporary shock from overwhelming grief...”

Grief? Why?

I saw my own body move. A hand that didn’t feel like mine picked up the phone beside the bed. The thumb slid across the screen mechanically, over and over. Photos flashed by-pictures of that girl smiling happily with a handsome man. He was gently ruffling her hair, eyes full of fondness.

Who was he? Why did my heart feel like an invisible hand was squeezing it, hurting so much I couldn’t breathe?

Joshua... Lydia let out a soft, broken cry deep in my mind. The sound was filled with endless sadness and despair, then it faded away because she was too exhausted.

I felt so confused. I didn’t understand what was happening. Why was I here? Why was my wolf crying? Why did looking at that man’s photos make my chest hurt so much?

“Aria?”

Noah’s voice hit me like thunder and yanked my floating consciousness back into that cold body. The world suddenly felt real again-the smell of disinfectant, the rough texture of the sheets, the sound of rain outside. Everything sharpened.

I blinked and came back to myself. Noah was standing by the bed, looking worried.

“Noah?” I managed a weak smile. “You’re here.” I tried to sit up a little, but the room spun. “I shouldn’t have stayed out in the rain like that. This fever is killing me.”

The worry in Noah’s eyes grew deeper.

“Oh, right, Noah,” I suddenly remembered and asked urgently, “Did my brother call you? We were supposed to have dinner together. If he can’t find me, he’ll definitely worry. Can you not tell him I’m in the hospital?”

I kept explaining, “I don’t want him worrying. The divorce stuff is already enough for him. I can’t make him stress over a little cold too.”

A flash of pain I couldn't quite read crossed Noah's face. His lips moved like he wanted to say something, but he swallowed it back.

"Aria..." he started, his voice strained.

"No, I should call him myself. Otherwise he'll figure it out anyway." I pushed the blanket aside, ready to get up and find my phone. "Where's my phone?"

A warm, big hand suddenly grabbed my wrist, stopping me. It was Noah.

"Aria." His voice was painfully hoarse.

I squirmed, getting more anxious. "Noah you know what my brother's like. If I don't call him, he'll go crazy and search everywhere for me..."

"He's gone!"

Noah closed his eyes and almost shouted the words.

My movements froze. Then I laughed like I'd heard the world's worst joke. "Noah, that's not funny at all."

His grip on my wrist tightened so much it felt like he might crush the bones. He opened his eyes. Those deep eyes were bloodshot and full of pain. He stared at me and said slowly, word by word:

*Aria, stop lying to yourself."

*Joshua... is dead. On his way back, his car flipped off the overpass. He's gone..."

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 117

Aria's POV

Joshua... dead?

+25 Pouits

Noah's words cut into my mind like a dull, rusty knife, over and over. Time seemed to stop. The whole world narrowed down to those few words echoing in the empty space inside my head.

Dead... overpass... car flipping...

Broken images flashed through my brain. Pouring rain in the dark night, blinding headlights, the screech of metal losing control, the moment it broke through the guardrail and plunged into the abyss... No, I shouldn't know these things. I shouldn't be imagining them!

I shook my head hard, trying to throw the horrible visions away.

He said he found out the truth about the Grayson Group accident from two years ago and got the evidence

Aria, wait for me to come back.

Joshua's voice was so clear in my ears, full of hope and confidence. He said he'd drive carefully. He said he knew I was waiting.

Yes.

Joshua, my brother, was dead.

He died on the road while investigating the truth from two years ago.

That thought hit me like a bolt of lightning, slicing through the fog in my mind and bringing sharp, painful clarity. The sadness was still there, but despair got replaced by something sharper and more solid.

I pulled away from Noah's arms. He watched me with worry, like he was afraid I'd break any second.

But I couldn't cry. It felt like all my tears had been washed away with my brother's life in that storm.

"Noah, I want to go to the police station." My voice sounded like it had been scraped raw with sandpaper.

"Police station?" Noah's frown deepened.

I pressed my lips tight, took a few seconds, then met his worried eyes and nodded slowly. "I want the full accident report on my brother's crash."

"Aria, I know it's hard to accept right now," he tried to calm me, speaking carefully. "But you're in bad shape. You need to stay in the hospital for observation. The rest can wait..."

"Noah, I don't believe it." I cut him off. "I don't believe my brother would crash like that."

I forced my weak body to sit straighter. “He called me before he headed back. He said he had evidence from the accident two years ago. We planned to go to the police together once he returned! He knew coming back safe was more important than anything. He promised me!”

< Chapter 114

My voice started cracking. My eyes burned. “Noah, you grew up with my brother. You know him! He’s so careful. He never even ran a red light. How could he speed in the rain?”

“He promised he’d drive safely, Noah. He promised...”

“Aria...” Noah opened his mouth, as if he wanted to say something.

“Noah, is there something you’re trying to tell me?”

“Yes, Aria. You’re going to be a mother. You’re pregnant-less than three months along.”

“What? Pregnant?”

It was as if my mind had been blown apart.

I was... pregnant again.

Before the divorce, Damon and I had unprotected sex, and I never took the morning-after pill-because the doctors had said conceiving again would be extremely difficult. Nearly impossible.

So I’d never even considered it.

My wolf had gone utterly still now.

Aria... you might be pregnant.

I swallowed hard.

“I... I don’t know what I’m supposed to do...”

Did I need to tell Damon? No.

This is my child.

Damon doesn’t love me-how could he ever love my child?

Besides, we’re getting divorced.

Noah moved a little closer and, just like when we were children, smoothed a hand over my hair. "It's alright, Aria. Whatever you decide, I'll be right there to face it with you."

Just then, the hospital room door clicked open.

A tall, cold figure appeared in the doorway. Noah's hand froze halfway up.

"...Mr. Hawthorne."

My husband, Damon. His sharp gaze swept coldly over Noah first, then landed on me. I met his eyes without thinking-those calm, bottomless eyes.

The next second, Noah stepped sideways and positioned himself in front of me protectively. "Mr. Hawthorne, Aria isn't in any condition to see anyone or talk about anything right now."

Damon took a few long strides and stopped in front of us. That heavy, oppressive feeling rolled off him. He narrowed his eyes at Noah. "Dr. Hargreaves, I am Arla's husband."

< Chapter 114

One sentence, and he labeled Noah as an outsider who had no right to interfere.

Noah's face turned cold. "Aria is almost divorced from you."

+25 Pronta

"Almost?" Damon's lips curved into a thin, cool smile as he looked down at Noah. "That means, Dr. Hargreaves, you also know we're not officially divorced yet. She is still my Luna." He put extra weight on the word "Luna," like he was claiming ownership. "I'm here to see my wife. Are you trying to stand in the way of the Hawthorne family, Dr. Hargreaves?"

Vote

compare to the Hawthorne's. Damon's threat wasn't empty.

"Justin." Damon gave the order coldly.

Justin immediately walked in with several men in black suits. He looked at Noah with no expression. "Dr. Hargreaves, Mr. Hawthorne has something to say to Mrs. Hawthorne. Please step outside."

Noah looked at the ready bodyguards.

Noah clapped his hands lightly. At the sound, several equally tall bodyguards in black suits stepped in- only these wore the crest of the Whitemoon Pack on their chests.

“You probably don’t know,” Justin said coldly, “that the biggest shareholder of this hospital is the Hawthorne family. Here, Mr. Hawthorne makes the rules.”

Noah smiled. “But perhaps Mr. Hawthorne doesn’t know-the group that owns this hospital answers to the Whitemoon Pack.”

My brother’s coid remains, the pointless standoff between two men, the weakness in my body, and the tightness in my mind... everything pressed down until I couldn’t breathe. The string called “sanity” finally snapped completely.

“Enough!”

I used every bit of strength I had left. My voice was hoarse and broken. The whole room went dead silent.

“Aria...”

Noah stopped and turned to look at me with worry.

I didn’t look at him. I looked straight at Damon and said hoarsely, “Noah, go on out first. I need to talk with Damon.”

Noah seemed to deflate a little. He only nodded.

Damon’s POV

Finally, only the two of us were left in the room. It was so quiet it was scary. The heavy pressure in the air made it hard to breathe. I stared at her silent profile. The face that used to be bright and lively was now gray and pale. Her eyes were empty like still water, no light at all. Something in my chest tightened, aching.

She’s breaking. Rhein’s voice growled low in my mind. Our mate, Damon. She’s breaking apart.

Knock knock.

dustin came back, holding a bunch of lilies. He must have felt the suffocating tension too. His movements

careful as he placed the flowers on the bedside table.

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 118

Alpha specially picked these for you.”

Aria kept her head down, hands gripping the edge of the bed, saying nothing, like she hadn’t heard.

I noticed her hand kept resting on her lower abdomen.

Was it stomach pain brought on by the nerves of being alone with me?

Justin awkwardly touched his nose and forced himself to speak again. “Miss Grayson, about your brother... Alpha started investigating the cause of the accident the moment he heard. Please... accept my condolences.”

At the words “the cause of the accident,” she finally reacted. She lifted her head sharply. Those dead eyes focused for the first time as she looked at Justin. “When will the investigation results be ready?”

I shot him a look. Justin understood immediately and changed his tone. “Alpha is handling it personally. The details... maybe it’s better if you talk directly with Alpha.”

Then he practically fled the room.

Of course Aria could tell Justin was doing it on purpose. She turned her head, glanced at the lilies, and the corner of her mouth curved in a way I couldn’t read-like she was mocking something. She didn’t ask me anything. She just sat there quietly. That silence felt like a silent punishment, and the irritation inside me grew stronger.

Go hug her! Rhein urged impatiently. Use your scent to comfort her instead of standing there like an idiot!

From the moment I learned about Joshua’s accident, I took the earliest flight back, used every connection to investigate the crash, and even awkwardly asked Justin to buy flowers-just hoping it would make her feel a little better. And what did I get? She’d rather stay with that outsider Noah. She’d rather talk to my subordinate than give me a single word.

“Aria,” my voice came out cold and heavy, carrying a hint of accusation I couldn’t hide. “Don’t you have anything to say to me?”

She finally looked up. Those empty eyes met mine calmly. She asked back, “What do you want me to say?”

I was choked by her question.

I knew she was hurting so badly she probably didn't want to talk. That was normal. But I couldn't stand seeing her like this-so lifeless. I'd rather she cursed me or hit me than watch her turn into a beautiful, breathing shell.

My throat bobbed. I spoke stiffly, "...The investigation results on Joshua's crash will be out soon."

I lied.

N

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Chapter 119

Damon's POV

The results were already in my encrypted mailbox. I'd even watched the blurry but cruel video copied from a following car's dashcam. I saw how Joshua's car lost control, flipped, fell off the overpass, and exploded into a fireball the moment it hit the ground. The report said coldly: no remains recovered.

Those words made me think of Liam instantly. I knew how much that kind of loss hurt-the feeling of having a piece of your life ripped out, leaving a hole that would never heal. And because of that damn mate bond, I could feel her heart being torn apart almost every second. I knew she was close to shattering. I couldn't give her any more shocks. No way.

The sharp pain coming through the mate bond made Rhein go quiet too. He felt her suffering even more directly. Don't tell her, he said after a long time, his voice muffled. Not now.

Aria lowered her eyes. Her voice was distant and flat. "Thank you."

Those two words didn't ease the irritation in my chest. Instead, they felt like a heavy stone pressing down, making it even harder to breathe.

Just then, there was another knock. A nurse walked in.

"Miss Grayson, let me check your temperature."

Aria lay down obediently. A moment later, the nurse looked at the thermometer and said, "Slight fever. Stay hydrated." Then her eyes fell on the lilies on the bedside table. She

frowned. “Why are there flowers in here? Miss Grayson, do you want me to take them away?”

My brows tightened immediately.

“...Throw

Aria’s gaze also landed on the flowers. Her long lashes trembled slightly. Then I heard her say, “... them away.”

Throw them?

The vein at my temple throbbed hard. The air around me turned freezing. She rejected us! Rhein roared in my head.

“Okay,” the nurse said like it was the most natural thing, picking up the bouquet. “These flowers are pretty, but for safety, it’s better to remove them,”

I asked coldly, “What’s wrong with the flowers?”

The nurse glanced at me, Since she didn’t recognize me, she spoke freely. “These are from you, right, sir? You probably aren’t very close with Miss Grayson. The flowers themselves are fine, but... Miss Grayson has a history of pollen allergy.”

She looked down at the lilies in her arms. “It’s mild, but her immune system is low right now. Staying around pollen for too long could make the symptoms worse.”

Pollen allergy?

My mind went blank. Rhein’s roar stopped abruptly, replaced by a sharper wave of self-blame that hit me straight on. Idiot! It’s you! You hurt her! His voice carried a pained whine. You tried to please her with something she’s allergic to! You almost poisoned our mate!

Something in my chest stung like it had been pricked. A strange pain. remembered her birthday, when that bunch of roses got thrown straight into the trash. So that was why?

The nurse left with the flowers. The room fell into dead silence again.

I looked at the woman on the bed who had turned her back to me. She had shifted to face away completely, rejecting any connection with me using her whole body.

“I don’t want to see you again. You should leave.” She finally spoke once more. Her voice was tired and hoarse, but her tone was firm, leaving no room for argument.

I opened my mouth, but nothing came out. I wanted to ask her why she wouldn't talk to me-but the words died on my tongue.

Only then did I realize that when she'd said she wanted to talk to me earlier, it had only been to keep me from clashing with Noah.

Right... and why would she? Because she hates me.

A cruelly clear thought rose in my mind.

Two years, Rhein's voice was full of contempt and disappointment. You didn't even know what your mate is allergic to. You never gave her a chance to tell you.

In the two years of our marriage, I had never once sent her flowers.

Even if she wanted to say something, she never had the chance.

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

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Damon's POV

The rain had stopped.

I didn't leave. I stayed in the car down in the parking garage.

Tim got in, carrying the accident report.

"The car flipped because he hit the brakes hard while speeding," he said quietly. "The fall damaged the electrical system. It caught fire on impact. By the time the fire department arrived, only the frame was left."

I flipped through the report-it matched the police's initial assessment. "What did forensics find at the scene?"

Tim hesitated, his face grim. "Damon, honestly? In this kind of accident, physical evidence doesn't matter much. Between the fall from the overpass and that fire..." He trailed off. "No one could have made it out."

I knew that logic. But every time I closed my eyes, I saw Aria lying lifeless in that hospital bed. I couldn't help pressing, "What about the surveillance?"

“That stretch of road was under maintenance,” Tim said, handing me a USB drive. “But a car behind caught the whole thing on its dashcam. Damon, the video clearly shows Joshua was driving too fast. You can watch it, but given Aria’s current mental state... I strongly suggest you don’t let her see it.”

“I know.” I took the drive and plugged it into the tablet. In the blurry footage, Joshua’s car lost control, rolled, fell, and burned... Every frame proved it was a tragic, unavoidable accident.

I turned off the tablet. The car fell into complete silence.

My heart felt squeezed by an invisible hand. Worry and a hard-to-describe irritation gnawed at me. Just then, someone knocked lightly on the window. It was Justin.

He handed me a velvet box and lowered his voice. “Alpha, this is the moonlight stone you asked for...”

I opened the box. A glowing white stone lay inside.

Only high-rank Alpha blood can activate it. It can soothe Aria’s severely damaged spirit. Are you sure you want to use your own blood? Rhein’s voice rang in my mind.

Of course. A little blood is nothing.

I stretched out my right hand. Sharp wolf claws popped out and sliced a deep cut across my palm. Blood dripped down. The moonlight stone absorbed it like a dry sponge. Then a greedy, domineering pull came from my palm, frantically sucking away my life force.

Sharp pain and weakness hit me all at once.

Does it hurt, Damon? Rhein’s mocking voice sounded in my head.

I gritted my teeth and ignored him.

Rhein’s voice grew clearer. Have you forgotten how it felt when she used her own blood to save you during the avalanche? And remember when she saved Claudia?

My breath caught.

The scene from that day crashed into my mind. Aria sitting in the hospital chair. I watched the nurse stick the needle into her arm, watched her blood flow into the bag.

What had I been thinking then? That she and her family owed me. Owed Claudia. This was what she deserved. I even thought it wasn’t enough.

You stood right there, watching coldly, thinking it was only natural, Rhein's voice whipped at my nerves like a lash. Now it's your turn. How much have you bled? Your face is already pale. She gave 600cc. A full 600cc! That's what she felt, Damon! That's what you made her feel! Alone, helpless, treated like a tool to repay a debt!

"Shut up!" I growled low. Cold sweat covered my forehead.

The icy feeling of life force being forcibly stripped away. A wave of belated, overwhelming regret and guilt crashed over me.

Finally, the pull from my palm stopped suddenly. The moonlight stone, now full of blood, glowed with a soft red light and carried my body heat.

I panted, my body weak, but my mind clearer than ever. I clenched the stone, pushed open the car door, and staggered toward the hospital room.

I opened the door. Under the moonlight, she was sleeping restlessly, brows tightly furrowed, murmuring, "Joshua... don't go..."

I walked to the bedside. "Joshua..." She suddenly grabbed my arm. Her hand was ice-cold.

I snapped back to reality, looking at her bloodless face. I turned my hand over, held hers, and gently placed the warm moonlight stone into her palm. Then, imitating Joshua's tone, I used a gentle voice I barely recognized-one full of endless guilt-and whispered beside her ear:

"Don't be afraid, Aria. I'm here."

Aria's POV

Today was my brother's funeral.

Because there were no remains to bury, we held a memorial service instead. The night before, I'd gone through his things alone-his favorite shirts, the books he'd been reading, that watch from the crash still stained with blood. I couldn't bring myself to throw any of it away. In the end, I kept the watch and donated the rest.

At the funeral home, I stood in the receiving line beside his photograph-not the formal portrait the funeral director had suggested, but one from last summer where he was actually smiling. Soft organ music drifted through the chapel.

I shook hands with everyone who came. Accepted their hugs. Heard their condolences blur together into white noise. "I'm so sorry for your loss." "He was a good man." "If you need anything..."

+25 Pounte

aid “Thank you” over and over until the words lost all meaning. I felt like a puppet going motions, my face frozen in the same polite, grief-stricken expression.

me in with the administrative staff, carrying white roses. He looked at me with deep sorrow. “I’m or your loss.

ed numbly. My eyes scanned the group behind him. Nearly everyone from the office had come.

arched the familiar faces, but didn’t find who I was looking for.

the first time all day, my mind cleared. Someone was missing.

took me a moment to find my voice. When I finally spoke, it came out hoarse:

“Shawn... Jenny Torrie... she didn’t come?”

Chapter 112-

+25 Fouita

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 121

Aria’s POV

My gaze moved past Shawn to the people behind him. Almost the entire secretary team had come, except for one person.

I paused, then forced the words out of my dry throat. “Jenny Torrie...”

Before Shawn could answer, a female colleague who was close with Jenny Torrie spoke up first.

“Miss, after Jenny Torrie heard about the accident, she fainted right there in the office. She’s still in the hospital today.”

I pressed my lips tight and looked at Shawn.

He understood immediately and said softly, “Don’t worry, Miss. Torrie is just in shock. She’ll be okay after a few days of rest.”

I didn't know exactly what had happened between my brother and Jenny. But from the way things looked when I visited the company last time, even if I couldn't be sure my brother liked her, at least she was special to him.

I found myself thinking that if my brother hadn't died, they might have gotten together eventually. His life could have gone so many different ways.

"Miss," Uncle Lucent stepped forward and reminded me gently, "it's almost time."

I nodded, looked at every guest with red eyes, and bowed deeply. Then I turned and walked toward the altar with Uncle Lucent.

Suddenly, there was a commotion behind us.

Uncle Lucent stopped and glanced back. His brows furrowed, and he couldn't hide the unwelcome look on his face. Still, out of politeness, he called to me-I'd been lost in my own thoughts.

I turned around. That approaching black figure hit me like a blade to the chest.

Claudia.

She wore a perfectly tailored black dress and carried an enormous bouquet of white lilies. Her heels clicked against the polished tiles-sharp, deliberate sounds that echoed through the vast, silent memorial hall.

Shawn's face darkened. He stepped forward to block her path. "Miss Stone, you're not welcome here."

Beneath her black lace hat, Claudia's delicate features were subtly made up-except for her lips, painted a vivid red. That pop of color stood out like a victory flag in this solemn black-and-white space. Brazen Disrespectful.

She blinked innocently, her gaze sliding past Shawn to lock onto me. "Aria, I know things haven't been good between us. I know you don't want me here. But Joshua was like a brother to me." Her voice cracked "I just need to say goodbye to him. One last time."

Chapter 11&

Tears welled in her eyes. "Please."

+25 Paints

She acted so sincere that the guests around us, who didn't know the truth, all looked at me with sympathy, as if I was the unreasonable one.

Her fake performance made my stomach turn.

My hands at my sides slowly clenched. My nails dug deep into my palms. I used the pain to hold back the nausea and anger rising inside me. After a long time, I forced a few words through my teeth. "Shawn, let her come over."

"Miss..." Shawn frowned, disapproving.

I knew what he was worried about. I shook my head at him, signaling I was fine. Only then did he reluctantly step aside.

Claudia lowered her head slightly. The shadow of her hat perfectly hid the flash of darkness and triumph in her eyes. She walked forward slowly, placed the huge bunch of white lilies right in the center of the altar, and said in a heartbroken tone:

"Joshua, I know you must be most worried about Aria."

"Don't worry. No matter how many misunderstandings there are between us, I'll be tolerant and kind to her. I'll treat her like my own little sister."

"Joshua, rest in peace."

As soon as she finished, her tears poured down like a faucet had been turned on. She cried beautifully, making people feel sorry for her.

After a while, she wiped her tears, walked up to me, and said softly, "Aria, my condolences."

Then, before I could react, she reached out and hugged me.

My whole body stiffened. I instinctively wanted to push her away.

But Claudia held on tight. Her breath brushed my ear. She smiled, voice dropping to a whisper only + could hear, every word venomous:

"Now that Joshua is dead, Aria... don't you feel guilty?"

My blood turned to ice.

Her eyes lifted to the black-and-white photo behind me. Her voice stayed soft, deadly:

"If you hadn't pushed to investigate two years ago, he'd still be alive. Wouldn't he?"

"Aria, it's you. You killed your brother."

All color drained from my face. I yanked her arms off me and gripped her wrist hard. My voice trembled uncontrollably.

“Claudia, it’s you! You tampered with my brother’s car!”

She looked at me with a smile that carried ice and said clearly, in a volume only I could hear:

Chapter

That’s right. It was me.”

25 Por

She enjoyed watching my face turn deathly pale. The corners of her mouth lifted higher, her eyes full of vicious pleasure.

“But it’s such a pity. Even if you know it was me, what can you do?”

“Aria, you’ll never find any evidence. Never.”

Then her smile vanished instantly. Her face switched to a look of shock and grievance. She cried out in pain:

“Ah!”

“It hurts... Aría, you’re hurting me...”

Looking at her extremely fake face, I no longer cared about the occasion or all the eyes watching. I tightened my grip until my knuckles turned white. I glared at her and demanded harshly:

“Why! Claudia, why did you do this!”

Claudia acted like she couldn’t understand me at all. She struggled hard while crying pitifully, “Aria, what are you talking about? What why? It hurts... Please let go! Ah!”

Her performance continued, but in my world there was only her smug face and the truth of my brother’s death. Overwhelming hatred and grief swallowed me. I used every ounce of strength and roared:

“Claudia!”

H

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 122

+25 Pounes:

Aria's POV

Claudia's words kept echoing in my ears.

'If you hadn't pushed to investigate two years ago, he'd still be alive. Wouldn't he?'

'Aria, you killed your brother.'

'Aria, you'll never find any evidence.'

Every word turned into the sharpest blade, slicing my already broken heart again and again. I couldn't stop shaking. My blood felt like it had frozen solid.

My eyes turned red. I stepped toward her one slow step at a time. Tears blurred my vision. All I could see was her hypocritical face. Hatred and pain exploded in my chest. I reached out and gripped her slender neck tightly.

"Claudia," my voice came out through gritted teeth, carrying a viciousness even I didn't recognize. "How. Dare. You."

I asked her with painful hatred, my voice trembling from unbearable grief. "If you hate me, come at me! Why did you go after my brother! He treated you like his own little sister. How could you do that to him!"

Uncle Lucent and Shawn's shocked voices sounded far away, unreal. "Miss, let go!"

I couldn't hear them. I didn't want to. I just wanted this woman to pay with her life for my brother.

Claudia's face started turning red. She scratched at my hands uselessly and forced out words. "I... I didn't... Aria, I didn't kill Joshua-"

Lies! Even now she was still lying!

"You're still lying!" I shouted, cutting her off. Seven days of holding it together, and I finally snapped. "You never should've touched my family!"

My hands tightened around her throat. "You should pay for it!"

At that moment, a big hand suddenly grabbed my wrist. The force was terrifying. Pain like my wrist bones were being crushed hit me, and I lost all strength. Claudia collapsed to the ground like a pile of mud, coughing violently.

My eyes were bloodshot with rage. I shook off the hand and tried to rush at Claudia again. But he stood there like a wall, blocking me.

“Damon,” I looked up at his cold, stern face. My voice carried a plea I didn’t even realize was there. “Don’t stop me. Please.”

I saw a flicker of reluctance in his eyes. A tiny, ridiculous spark of hope lit in my chest. Maybe... maybe he would believe me.

As throat bobbed. In the end, he still reached out and firmly blocked me. He said word by word, “Aria,

Joshua’s death was an accident. It has nothing to do with Claudia.”

“No!” I screamed like a madwoman. “It was her! Claudia tampered with my brother’s car! She killed him!”

I grabbed his sleeve. Tears poured down. “Damon, believe me just this once, okay? Just once! I’m begging you. I’m not lying. It was her!”

But he pulled away, impatient. “Enough Aria, haven’t you caused enough trouble?!”

“Trouble?”

That

Wha

ch

d chilled me to the bone. I dropped his sleeve and stared at him. A hollow laugh escaped me.

en hoping for anymore? When it came to me versus Claudia, I already knew who he’d earned that lesson plenty of times.

pe I’d had left finally died.

stung by the dead look in my eyes, but he still took out what he called evidence-a copy of the report and a USB drive. “This is the accident report and the video of what happened. Before and incident, Claudia never left the city and never met Joshua.”

Sice was cold and heavy. Every word hit me like a hammer. “Aria, she never had the chance to tamper anything!”

he had already prepared a perfect alibi for her.

lowered my eyes and bit my lip until it bled. The metallic taste mixed with the bitterness in my throat. I laughed, then looked up-at him first, then at the trembling woman behind him who was still pretending to be innocent. I said softly, “Fine.”

He seemed to want to say something, even reached for me, but I dodged.

“Damon,” I asked him coldly, “what if I say that today, no matter who tries to stop me, I’m going to kill Claudia?”

I didn’t wait for his answer. The moment he frowned, I used the last bit of strength I had left and shot toward Claudia like an arrow leaving the string.

“No!”

In her terrified scream, my hands closed around her neck again. This time, I wasn’t letting go.

But Damon was faster. He grabbed my arm and flung me away without mercy!

All my strength had been poured into Claudia. I had nothing left to resist that huge force. I was thrown backward, stumbling hard, and crashed straight into the altar-

Bang!

A harsh, lou

I turned

moti

o slide from the altar. It seemed to fall in slow

hattering everywhere.

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 123

Aria’s POV

+25 Pointa

The dull impact exploded behind me. I didn't even feel the pain of my back hitting the altar. The sound of my brother's photo hitting the floor cut through everything else.

Time seemed to stop.

Suddenly, every memory came flooding back.

'I can stop assigning you bodyguards, but if anything happens, you have to tell me.'

Cross my heart and hope to die, stick a needle in my eye.

'You're way too old to be doing pinky promises... Okay, okay. Forever and ever, no take-backs.

"Forever and ever, no take-backs..." The pain in my body disappeared. My voice came out raw and broken.

"I'm sorry," I whispered, collapsing onto the floor, completely drained. "I'm so sorry, Joshua. This is all my fault. I couldn't even protect your photo..."

I was wrong about everything.

"Joshua, please, don't leave me! I was wrong!" I cried helplessly, staring at his photo on the cold ground. "Please come back!"

When despair had completely swallowed me, a familiar voice cut through my grief.

"Aria..."

I jerked my head up and saw Astrid. Like I was drowning and she was my only lifeline, I reached for her. My hands wouldn't stop shaking. "Astrid... Astrid, please help me. Help me save my brother... Please hurry, don't let him leave me..."

Astrid rushed over, knelt down, and pulled me tightly into her arms. Her voice was also choked with tears. "I'm sorry... I'm sorry I came back too late..."

"Astrid, what do I do..." I clung to the corner of her clothes like a lost child. "I can't hold onto my brother anymore. Why... why can't I hold on..."

"I'm here now. Don't be afraid."

All the tension and forced strength I'd held for seven days collapsed completely.

"Brother... I don't have a brother anymore..."

I finally broke down and cried loudly in that mess. The last moment before consciousness slipped away, I just felt so tired. I wanted to follow my brother.

Damon's POV

I only snapped out of the chaos when I saw Noah carrying the unconscious Aria away.

4 Chapter 120-

Her desperate cry earlier had gripped my heart like an invisible hand.

I knew I shouldn't have pushed her.

It was me who knocked over Joshua's photo and shattered the last bit of comfort she had left.

But at that moment, I saw Claudia about to suffocate and didn't have time to think...

I was still feeling irritated when I caught Astrid standing up from the corner of my eye. After handing Aria to Noah, her red eyes locked onto Claudia, who was hiding behind me. Her gaze was ice-cold, like she wanted to cut Claudia into pieces.

Claudi

"A

ed and shrank further behind me.

own." I frowned and stepped in front of Claudia.

Astrid let out a harsh laugh. "You don't get to tell me to calm down, Damon Hawthorne! ng your own wife like dirt for another woman. Why the hell should I calm down?"

d hit me like a slap to the face.

Must have been out of her mind to fall for you! She lost her family. That kind of pain-it destroys you. What have you done as her husband? Open your eyes. All her patience, everything she's put up with- e has it gotten her?"

y gaze involuntarily moved to Aria in Noah's arms. Her face was deathly pale and lifeless. Astrid's words eft me with nothing to say.

But-

"Aria attacked Claudia first." I spoke heavily. That was the truth.

“Then Claudia deserved it!” Astrid shouted. She pushed past me and grabbed Claudia’s collar. “Get out of my way. I’d like to see who dares stop me today!”

“Astrid, what are you doing!” Claudia screamed in terror.

Astrid ignored her completely and dragged her toward the steps outside the memorial hall. My face darkened. I immediately moved to stop her.

“Damon.”

A hand blocked my path. It was Marcus

“Marcus?” I looked at him, confused.

“Don’t worry. Claudia won’t die from rolling down those steps.” Marcus’s expression was calm, but his tone left no room for ar

He paused

involved

In th

ald

my sister. I promised our parents I would protect her.”

“Also, if you still want to keep Aria, you’d better not get

am cut through the air. The next second, she had

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 124

Aria’s POV

Some days after Joshua’s funeral, it snowed.

I lay in bed like a hollow shell with its soul scooped out, until Astrid’s voice pulled me back to reality.

I’d lost all track of time.

I looked down at my still-flat stomach. Almost four months along, and not the slightest curve yet.

Noah examined me and said the baby was fine-just developing slowly.

No matter how much nutrition I took in every day, the child inside me kept growing at a sluggish pace.

“Aria, it’s snowing.”

I slowly opened my heavy eyelids, pushed myself up, and looked out the window. Snowflakes drifted down lightly, covering the gray world with a thin layer of white. But it couldn’t hide the rot and dirt underneath.

“Come on, have some chicken soup.” Astrid sat by my bed with a bowl of chicken soup and handed me the spoon. “After this, let’s go for a walk and enjoy the snow, okay? It’s the first snow of the year.”

I took the bowl silently. I had no appetite, but I still forced down a few mouthfuls mechanically.

Seeing I wasn’t talking, Astrid turned and opened my closet. “Let me see what you should wear... How about this one?” She held up a brown coat, then rejected it herself. “No, too gloomy. This moon-white one is nice. It suits you. This one, okay?”

Her voice was like a warm spring breeze, trying hard to melt the ice around me. I looked at that moon-white trench coat with empty eyes.

“...Okay.” My voice was so hoarse it barely sounded like mine.

Hearing my answer, Astrid smiled happily and placed the clothes beside the bed.

I watched her busy back and said softly, “Astrid, will you come with me to the civil affairs office tomorrow?”

Her movements stopped abruptly. She turned around and met my dead eyes. After a few seconds of eye contact, she didn’t ask why. She just nodded firmly. “Okay. I’ll go with you.”

At that moment, a tiny bit of warmth finally touched my frozen heart.

“Astrid, thank you.”

She sat back down beside me and held my cold hands. Warmth flowed steadily from her palms. “Aria, I just want you to get better. It can take as long as it needs. As long as you’re okay.”

I looked at her steadily and nodded.

After Astrid left, I put the bowl on the bedside table and took out my phone. My fingertips tapped out a number I knew by heart. Each digit felt like it was being carved out of my heart with a knife.

A

Chapter 121 +pressed call.

-The phone was picked up almost instantly, as if he had been waiting.

Neither of us spoke first. Only faint static crackled in the dead silence. I walked barefoot to the window, pushed it open, and let the cold wind carrying snowflakes rush in. It froze me to the bone.

“Mr. Hawthorne,” I finally spoke. My voice was cold, without a trace of warmth.
“Tomorrow I’m coming to the villa to pack up my things. There’s no reason to drag this out any longer-it’s pointless.”

Damon said nothing.

The next day, I went to collect my things.

Damon leaned against the doorframe, watching me.

I finished quickly. We hadn’t been married long, and my things barely filled half a suitcase-light, hardly anything at all.

From beginning to end, I never once looked back at him.

“I thought moving out would take ages. I didn’t expect it to be this fast.” Astrid was waiting for me at the front gate, smiling with satisfaction. “Looking good! Come on, let’s go home!”

With some effort, I hefted the suitcase into place.

I still hadn’t told Astrid about the pregnancy.

Maybe it was the hormones, but I was afraid any uncertainty might affect the baby’s development.

I’d grown sensitive inside, too, and my already weak body felt even more fragile.

Astrid climbed into the driver’s seat. I had just reached for the car door-

A wave of dizziness slammed into me.

I wanted to call out to Astrid, but I no longer had the strength to make a sound.

The next second, a broad arm caught me, and a hand gripped my wrist tight.

The scent, the touch-I knew them so well.

I didn't even need to look to know who it was. Damon.

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Chapter 122~

Damon's POV

Her skin felt cool, but her touch burned straight through me.

A low, satisfied growl rolled through my mind-Rhein. Don't let go. We can't lose her again.

I didn't want to let go.

The thought-no, the instinct-consumed me, taking over everything else. Coming to the courthouse today to sign those divorce papers was the biggest mistake I'd ever made.

Aria's struggling snapped me back to reality.

I looked down. Angry red marks circled her wrist where I'd been gripping too hard.

You're hurting her, you idiot! Rhein shouted. Ease up! But don't let go!

Afraid of hurting her again, that strong possessive urge retreated in front of her pain. My fingers loosened against my will.

My palm was empty.

A sharp pain, like my soul was being torn apart, exploded in my chest. My vision went black.

Ah-! It hurts! Rhein let out a miserable wail in my head. Why did you let go? The bond... our bond is weakening! You lost her!

The moment she was free, she backed away quickly like she was avoiding the plague. Every movement showed clear rejection of me.

There were only a few steps between us, but it felt like a bottomless abyss.

My palm was empty, and so was my heart. Huge panic and irritation swept over me. I clenched my fists until my knuckles turned white, using all my strength to hold back the urge to grab her again, while also suppressing Rhein's crazy desire to break free.

My throat rolled with difficulty. I heard my own voice come out dry and stiff. "...I'm sorry."

"At your brother's funeral," I said desperately, "I didn't mean for you to fall that hard."

The corner of her mouth curved into an icy, sarcastic smile. "My brother is already dead. And you ruined his funeral. I can't forgive you on behalf of a dead person."

She doesn't want us anymore... Rhein's voice instantly changed from roaring to a disappointed whimper. She really... doesn't want us anymore... The pain from that disappointment hurt even more than the earlier tearing.

"If you only came to say that, then that's it. I'm tired." She turned away coldly.

No!

I reached out instinctively, but this time she dodged it, already prepared.

Chapter 122-

"Mr. Hawthorne, is there anything else?"

"Mr. Hawthorne"... That title felt like an ice wall. My eyes uncontrollably moved past her to the man standing beside her car Noah.

It's him!! Rhein instantly switched from grief to rage. A murderous low growl exploded in my skull. He has her scent on him! He wants to steal our mate! Kill him!

A fire surged up, burning away all my reason, "You're with Noah now?"

She let out a light laugh full of mockery. "That's my business. It doesn't seem to have anything to do with you, M thorne."

Yeal

br

no relationship anymore. But why did my heart hurt so much? It hurt so badly I could barely

bank card in a panic, trying to sound steady to cover my embarrassment. "There are five lion in this card..."

Mis?" she cut me off coldly. "Divorce compensation? Or an apology for ruining my brother's ecause of another woman?"

hat was just an accident!" Her accusation made me irritable. "Astrid already pushed Claudia down teps and broke her leg. Isn't that enough-"

ot enough!" she interrupted sharply, her eyes surging with overwhelming hatred. "I wish I could kill her!"

hat crazy hatred made my heart turn cold. I shouted harshly, "Aria, your tantrum should have limits!"

She looked at me. The light in her eyes dimmed little by little until only dead silence remained.

"Damon Hawthorne," she said calmly. Every word felt like a death sentence. "You'd better stay by Claudia's side every second. Otherwise-I will kill her with my own hands. She should pay for my brother's life."

With that, she took the card from my hand and snapped it.

The crisp sound of breaking rang out.

In that instant, an indescribable, heart-wrenching pain shot through my body and soul. It felt like the invisible bond between us had been cruelly snapped by her own hands.

Rhein let out a heart-rending scream in my mind. The pain felt so real that I twitched violently and almost lost my balance. Cold sweat instantly soaked my back.

She threw the broken pieces on the ground like she was throwing away our years of history, throwing away all her expectations of me.

At the club, I d

Rhein whi

So

numb the bone-deep ache.

ain echoing through me. When he hurt, I hurt.

N

<Chapter 122

Tim's words hit like a punch. I looked up sharply and shot him an icy glare.

tirritably finished the drink in my glass. They didn't understand. They would never understand. Personally letting go of your mate and allowing that bond to be ripped apart—that kind of torture.

This loss of control, the panic of losing Aria, mixed with Rhein's endless wailing, wrapped around me like a tight net I couldn't escape.

H

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 126

Chapter 123-

Aria's POV

Half a month later, I returned to work at Skydreame Design Institute.

Dana called everyone together to announce the new associate director for the team. After she spoke, I felt nearly everyone's eyes land on me at once.

Word of my brother's death had gotten out-and with it, the fact that I was the eldest Grayson daughter. Everyone knew without anyone having to say it: the associate director position that had been vacant for months was mine. Peggy leaned over and whispered excitedly, "Congratulations! I knew you'd-"

Dana cleared her throat. Her gaze swept over me with some complexity, then settled on the office door. "The new associate director for Team Three is Claudia Stone."

I heard Peggy's voice cut off. The smile on her face froze.

The office fell into dead silence. The hands that had been ready to clap stopped awkwardly in mid-air. Then a familiar figure walked in. Her voice was gentle in a way that made me sick. "Hello everyone, I'm Claudia." Behind her, two bodyguards carried two big boxes of LV gift bags, saying they were welcome gifts for the colleagues.

After a short moment of shock, the office was flooded with compliments and surprised praise. I watched coldly as my colleagues swarmed over, happily picking out gifts.

“A bunch of opportunists!” Peggy’s face turned pale with anger, defending me. “That position was obviously supposed to be yours!”

A female colleague who had just received a gift bag glanced at her and muttered, “Come on. The Grayson family has fallen. Everyone knows Miss Stone is backed by Damon Hawthorne now. People climb toward higher places. What’s so strange about that?”

Claudia lowered her lashes and put on her best pitiful look. “Aria, are you still mad at me? I wanted to explain to you earlier, but Astrid pushed me down the stairs and I was in the hospital for a long time... Luckily, Damon stayed with me the whole time.”

Every word was showing off Damon’s favoritism toward her. I couldn’t be bothered. I kept my face blank and stared at the computer screen as if I hadn’t heard.

She wouldn’t give up and took another step closer.

I finally lost patience. I stood up suddenly. The chair scraped against the floor with a sharp, harsh sound. I fixed Claudia with a cold stare. She stepped back. “Be grateful it wasn’t me who pushed you,” I said. “If it had been, you wouldn’t be standing here today.”

Claudia’s face paled, but she quickly recovered with the support of her bodyguards and said smugly, “Aria, you can’t touch me.” She jerked her chin toward the men behind her, her voice full of pride “If you don’t believe me, look whose people they are.”

My gaze moved past her to the badges on the two bodyguards’ chests-the exclusive mark of the Hawthorne family.

<Chapter 123

Hooked at them quietly, then the corners of my mouth slowly curved into a cold, sarcastic smile.

“Oh really?”

I lowered my eyes, a cold smile tugging at my lips. I braced my hands on the desk and took two steps toward Claudia.

Sure enough, she stepped back unconsciously, her face full of tension. “Aria, you...”

I stopped, enjoying her panic with a half-smile, and asked lightly, “Claudia, if you really think I can’t touch you, then why are you scared right now?”

“I’m not!” Like I’d hit a sore spot, she raised her voice sharply.

That shrill retort made the colleagues who had been excited about the welcome gifts all turn their heads toward us at once. Whispering spread like a tide.

“Are they about to fight? One’s the new boss, the other is the Grayson Group heiress. Who dares to step in?”

“I feel bad for Aria. The associate director spot got taken just like that...”

“How can you say that? Claudia is a famous designer. Her skills aren’t worse than Aria’s, right? Leadership cares about ability.”

“Yeah, Aria only gets respect here. When it comes to real ability... she might not even be as good as me.”

Those stinging comments drilled into my ears. I didn’t care. I saw Claudia listening to the words that favored her, and the corner of her mouth lifted in a smug smile. She thought a few LV bags could buy people’s hearts. She placed one on my desk and smiled. “Aria, I’m really looking forward to working with you.”

I glanced at the bag, then casually picked up a folder and swept it off the desk without mercy. Under everyone’s shocked stares, I said nothing and walked straight out of the office.

As soon as I stepped out, Dana called me into her office.

“Aria, I’m really sorry about the director thing.” She got straight to the point, guilt on her face. “I didn’t know the higher-ups would arrange it this way...”

“Dana, no need to apologize.” I interrupted her calmly.

“Aria, you’re very talented. It’s just that this environment isn’t right for you anymore. There’s a development project that would mean spending seven months abroad-I’d really like you to take it.”

Dana handed me a project proposal.

I read through the document carefully. A faraway country, generous compensation, a remarkable project with international masters involved.

I wanted to leave, too-but-

My father still needs his treatment here.

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

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Aria's POV

Dana seemed to catch my hesitation. "There's no rush, Aria. Take a week to think it over."

She gave me a kind smile. "I sincerely hope your talent won't go to waste."

I thanked Dana and walked out of the office.

Peggy had come at just the right time to take me to a new restaurant nearby.

However, a delivery guy walked in carrying a huge bunch of bright red roses and asked loudly, "Who is Claudia?"

The office door opened. Claudia walked out with perfectly timed surprise on her face.

"Wow, such a big bouquet of red roses! Director Stone, is this from your boyfriend?"

"It must be from Mr. Hawthorne! So romantic!"

Under the crowd's envy and flattery, Claudia showed a shy smile and said in a voice that wasn't too loud but clear enough, "This is just between us for now. Damon and I agreed not to make it public yet, so please don't spread it around."

Soon after, several more delivery people arrived with high-end restaurant takeout. Claudia looked sweetly shy while generously letting everyone share. The office filled with laughter and chatter, like a celebration party just for her.

"Ugh-I'm gonna throw up!" Peggy couldn't stand it anymore. She dragged me by the arm toward the door. "Let's go eat. Watching her makes me lose my appetite!"

Once we were outside, she imitated Claudia's coy voice. "Oh my, Damon is really sweet."

I couldn't help laughing and linked arms with her. "Alright, alright, stop being mad. It's not worth ruining your appetite over her. Besides, who knows how long Claudia will actually sit in that position."

Peggy paused and turned to look at me.

I winked at her mysteriously and handed her the menu. "What do you want to eat? My treat."

Damon's POV

The heat in the car kept out the wind and snow, but it couldn't settle the unease churning through me. I stared out at the entrance of Skydream Design Institute from the back seat, my fingers absently working the edge of my cufflink.

Why are we still waiting here? Rhein's voice roared in my mind. He was pacing impatiently. She's right inside. Go up. Find her.

I closed my eyes, trying to push down the urge. I was here to pick up Claudia. It was my mother's order- an absurd order I should have refused.

Rhein sneered in my heart. You're just using it as an excuse to see her. Admit it. You miss her so much

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you're going crazy.

He was right.

+25 Pointe

I thought burying myself in work would push her out of my world. But when my mother announced in that matter-of-fact tone that Claudia would join Skydream and that I would be responsible for picking her up, Aria's face appeared so clearly it startled me. Those cool, stubborn almond eyes seemed to pierce through time, mocking my self-deception

Right then, the glass door I had been staring at for so long was pushed open.

It was her.

Aria walked out. Camel coat, white scarf, snowflakes resting on her hair and shoulders. She looked down at her phone, focused. Her nose and cheeks were slightly red from the cold, giving her a fragile kind of beauty.

My breath caught for a second.

Rhein's voice filled with the excitement before a hunt. What are you waiting for? Get out of the car! Now! Don't let her leave!

Claudia beside me also saw her. Her tone carried just the right amount of probing. "Damon, isn't that Aria? It's so cold. Why don't we give her a ride?"

Before she even finished speaking, she had already pushed the car door open herself.

Now! Rhein roared in my head. This is your chance!

This time, I didn't resist.

Like I'd been waiting for an excuse, I shoved the door open and got out. The freezing wind hit my face, carrying snow, but instead of cooling me off, it only fed the fire in my veins. I watched Claudia reach for Aria, watched Aria shake her off.

"Ah..."

Claudia let out a small cry and stumbled backward.

That annoying little act again. My mind knew exactly what she was doing, but my body-Rhein's doing- moved forward on its own and caught her around the waist before she could fall.

But it was just reflex. My attention, my eyes-everything went straight past her and locked onto Aria.

"I didn't touch her." She didn't even look at me when she said it, her voice completely flat.

"Yeah, Damon, I just lost my balance. It's not Aria's fault." Claudia played her role perfectly in my arms.

I ignored her completely. I just stared at Aria with deep eyes. My throat felt dry. I couldn't get a single word out. I wanted to ask if she was cold, I wanted to ask if she was doing okay. I wanted to pull her into my arms and warm her with my body heat.

Tell her you believe her! Rhein urged.

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Damon's POV

She suddenly sneezed, like a little cat.

She finally looked up at me. That glance was so brief it felt like an illusion. Then she looked away indifferently. She checked her phone and turned to leave, as if we were just two annoying obstacles in her

way.

Don't let her go! Rhein barked.

"I know."

I finally spoke. My voice was hoarse, not like my own. I was answering her explanation. I wanted her to

know I believed her.

Her steps seemed to pause for a tiny, almost unnoticeable moment, but that was all. She didn't look back. She walked resolutely into the wind and snow and disappeared around the corner.

I stared in the direction she had vanished.

"Damon, are you... angry?" Claudia's voice pulled me back.

I let go of her waist. My tone was so indifferent it surprised even me. "No." My eyes swept over her leg. "Get in the car. I'll take you back."

Back in the car, Claudia kept trying to play the wronged but kind role. "Damon, I was just trying to..."

"Claudia, today I came to pick you up only because my mother asked me to. Starting tomorrow, I'll have someone else to pick you up."

Her expression changed slightly. "But you promised Aunt..."

I turned my head. "Did I promise you?"

She choked on her breath.

"I've been very busy lately." I looked away.

"And-has your ankle healed?"

I'd just noticed that she'd been able to put her full weight on it getting into the car, with no sign of a sprain at all.

Her tears spilled over.

"No, it still hurts a lot. But I bear it. You know me-an injury this small is nothing."

Her tears softened my tone. "I've been busy lately, competing with the Whitemoon Pack. Next time, I'll have the driver bring you."

I said nothing more to her.

Rhein was roaring a single name inside me-Aria

I found myself wondering: did her wounds still hurt?

She'd been hurt so many times. So many times-directly or indirectly, because of me.

Claudia's POV

+25 Ports

Damon had turned cold on me again. He dropped me off at the hospital room and walked out without once looking back.

He said he had something urgent to deal with-something to do with the Whitemoon Pack...

He said he'd be back soon.

I didn't believe him. For all I knew, that bitch Aria had lured him away again.

Why was it that she got everything so effortlessly?

The Alpha's love. A gift for design. A family that doted on her.

And me? Everything I had was built on lies.

I knew the truth: if I hadn't deceived Damon, he'd never have spared me a second glance.

Lies, I sneered to myself. Yes, I'd told them-only to survive a little better in this cruel world.

But I had to admit it: the weight of those lies was crushing.

Now and then I had nightmares.

I'd dream that Aria had exposed every lie, that she stood wrapped sweetly in Damon's arms.

She would laugh at me: "Look at her-only a fool like Claudia would ever have to lie her way into being loved."

In the dream I lost everything-my reputation, my fortune, Damon...

And was thrown into a prison with no daylight.

I clenched my fists in secret, until my nails bit into the flesh.

The pain snapped my mind clear-no. I can't let Aria have a good life.

I would make her taste what it was to live in hell.

Joshua was dead. It wasn't enough.

And old Grayson-maybe if he died too, Aria's whole world would finally shatter for good.

I'd understood it since I was a child: torturing someone's body is only the foundation. It's the ruin of the spirit that makes an enemy wish for death.

BesidesNo matter what I did, Damon would never suspect me.

Aria, go on and savor this hell on earth.

HTook out my phone and dialed that familiar number. "Charlie. I need a little favor."

A

I'd arranged for a hacker to cut the surveillance in the hospital garden.

But the hacker told me Damon had recently had the system upgraded; the best he could do was blur the footage.

"Don't worry, miss. Even your own parents couldn't pick you out of that picture."

Charlie had introduced me to this hacker. He'd cost a fortune.

My heart was still uneasy. This was the first time I'd dirtied my own hands.

I was asking a nurse for old Grayson's room number when the elevator doors behind me slid open again.

I recognized them at a glance. Ronan Grayson... and his butler, Laurence.

My heart lurched.

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I dropped my gaze at once and letting my face sink into shadow. And then, all of a sudden, a thought struck me, and the corner of my mouth twitched on its own.

I had never hurt anyone with my own hands.

I was good at manipulating people-it was my gift-and I loathed it.

Because I'd seen too many people who got everything they wanted without lifting a finger.

What was left of the goodness in me whispered: Claudia, stay away from evil. Leave this place. Don't go through with it.

I stole a glance at Ronan. The truth was, Ronan had never really remembered me. We'd met only once, years ago, when Aria dragged me to a high-end restaurant I'd never have dared walk into alone. Afterward, Ronan came to pick her up.

He ruffled Aria's hair, his smile so bright it was as if she were the moon itself. She clung to his arm, giggling-indulged and adored.

I had stood there like a pile of stray garbage.

That was the first time I tasted envy.

I'd spent my whole life clawing for my parents' approval, while Aria was loved as easily as breathing.

I lifted my head. Just as I expected-Ronan didn't recognize me.

"Would you like to come in, miss?" he asked politely,

"No," I answered softly.

He and Laurence stepped inside. We rode down together.

Ronan suddenly turned his head. "Have we met before? Your voice sounds familiar."

My heart skipped a beat. "No," I said lightly. "I'm a voice actress. You may have heard me somewhere."

He accepted that. After they left the ground floor, I stayed where I was, staring at the buttons, fury spreading through me like flame.

Ronan had come from the VIP intensive-care ward.

pms were reserved for the rich and the powerful. And he was neither, now.

meone had arranged all of it. Only one name made sense... Damon.

my palms. He'd move mountains for Aria's father... but never for me.

never once been treated like that.

rowled low.

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He'd chosen Aria.

I'd known it for a long time. But now I would make them pay for it.

I followed Ronan out.

The garden was silent, the winter air so sharp it stung the lungs.

Ronan sat alone beneath the eaves of the pavilion.

"Mr. Grayson," I called as I approached.

+25 Pointy

"You... you're the woman from the elevator?" He turned, startled. "And....you called me Mr. Grayson? You know me?"

"Yes."

His scent changed instantly. He went wary, guarded. "Then why pretend you didn't know me?" he asked. "What is it you want?"

I widened my eyes-gentle, harmless.

"Mr. Grayson... do you really not remember me?"

He looked at me more closely. And then, it seemed, he placed me.

"You..."

"I'm Claudia Stone," I said with a bitter smile. "Aria's friend. Years ago, on my birthday, we had a meal together. You were the one who drove me home."

"Right... yes." The memory surfaced, and he relaxed a little.

I went on. "I pretended not to know you in the elevator because I wanted to see whether you still remembered me."

I paused, letting disappointment color my voice. "I didn't think you'd really have forgotten."

"I'm sorry. At my age, I sometimes mix people and things up. But I remember now-you're Aria's schoolmate." He looked apologetic. What a fool.

"Back then, Aria said she wanted to treat you to a nice dinner. She insisted book a table at a place you could hardly get into. She was so afraid I'd forget, she kept reminding me, nagging me to reserve it."

"Yes," I said warmly. "It's coming back to you now, isn't it?"

He chuckled. "My memory isn't what it used to be."

I stepped closer and lowered my voice. "I heard about what your family has been through these past two years. You've borne so much."

His face turned grave. "A man should answer for his own mistakes."

What noble words. I nearly laughed out loud.

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Then I lowered my lashes, hiding the glee burning in my eyes.

It was time to get to the point.

"I'm worried," I said softly, about how Joshua's death might affect you."

I looked at him for a quiet moment, then added, "Though seeing you well now... it really is a relief."

In that instant, everything seemed to freeze.

Ronan shot to his feet, hard enough that the bench scraped against the stone with a shrill, grating sound.

Shock spread across his face.

"What did you say?"

I widened my eyes and stumbled back a step, feigning terror, letting my scent thicken with false fear.

H

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 130

Claudia's POV

"Mr. Grayson..."

Ronan lunged at me-faster than I'd braced for, for an old man just out of prison. His hand clamped around my arm with startling strength. Even so, I could feel the faint tremor running through his fingers.

His voice shook. "What did you just say? Say it again!"

I dropped my gaze, pressed my lips tight, and pretended to hesitate.

My wolf purred low.

Ronan's breathing turned ragged, his grip tightening until it nearly hurt him.

"Say it!" he barked.

I flinched theatrically. "I... I said I was relieved to see you looking well..."

"No!" His eyes went wild, bloodshot, frantic. "You-what did you just say about Joshua?"

This is the fear that lives in the heart of every parent.

I drew the silence out on purpose, savoring the thunder of his pulse. Then, slowly, I repeated the name.

"Joshua..."

I watched the flicker of desperate hope on his face-and then I snuffed it out.

"Joshua had a car accident two months ago. His car went off an overpass." I tilted my head and added coldly, "There wasn't even a whole body left to bury."

Ronan went utterly still, like a wolf struck through the heart.

The blood drained from his face in an instant; his cheeks seerked to cave inward.

My wolf smiled.

He looked already half-dead. He staggered back, his legs giving out, and collapsed into the chair. One hand pressed to his chest, his breath came fast, as if a boulder sat on his ribs. His breathing went shallow. broken.

For a moment I thought he might faint.

I drew nearer and looked down at him.

From this angle, he looked so small. No longer the proud, wealthy father of years ago-just an old wolf crushed beneath his grief.

I worked to school my expression, putting on a look of remorse.

“Mr. Grayson, I didn’t realize no one had told you Joshua was gone. I’m so sorry.” There wasn’t an ounce of

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sincerity in my voice. “If I’d known, I never would have mentioned it.”

My wolf snickered. Girl, you really are a born liar.

I leaned down slightly “Such a pity. I’d even meant to tell you a few other interesting little secrets.” I

ced at his trembling hand, still pressed to his chest. “But I’m not sure you could bear it right now.”

ze snapped to me.

You...

the understood. He realized I hadn’t been careless-I’d done it on purpose.

miled. “Never mind. I’ll tell you anyway. But, Mr. Grayson-brace yourself.”

His breath caught.

I savored every second, sweeping a look of open contempt over him.

“You must be dying to know why the building project you personally oversaw two years ago collapsed.”

His eyes went wide. “It was you, behind it all?”

Shock crossed his face, then denial. “No... it couldn’t have been you.”

I arched a brow, arrogance flaring up in me all at once.

“And why couldn’t it be me?” I asked.

I folded my arms and laughed softly.

“Three years ago-you probably didn’t know-I joined the architectural design department of Grayson Group as an intern. I was ambitious then, hungry for success.”

I drew a deep breath, reliving the memory.

“The company announced a major project, and promised a five-hundred-thousand-dollar bonus for the winning design.”

I looked straight into his pale face. “I wanted that money. I wanted to study abroad. I wanted a future.”

I took another step

to work.”

I thought of a

“I arrived

hands

His

six whole months, I lived with those blueprints in my

d slowly. “My design won.”

pressed deeper.

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“But the credit was supposed to go to my supervisor.”

Ronan stared at me, dumbstruck, saying nothing.

“Why?” I hissed. “Because I had no pedigree, no background, no connections.”

My claws dug into my palms.

“My supervisor’s niece wanted in, so my work became hers. I gave them brilliance, and they gave me nothing.”

As I spoke, the old fury rose from somewhere deep inside, hot and sharp, my voice growing more jagged with every word.

“I couldn’t accept it!” I snapped. “It wasn’t fair!”

Ronan clutched his chest, his breathing labored. Pale and weak as he was, he still tried to put on a righteous front.

“You... you could have reported it to HR...”

I burst out laughing. “HR?” I said with utter scorn. “They’re nothing but a nest of vipers and sewer rats!”

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Claudia’s POV

“I realized very quickly that no one was coming to save me,” I went on. “So I decided to rely on myself.”

I leaned in, letting him catch every syllable.

“I swore I’d make them pay.”

He swallowed painfully, his throat bobbing.

I smiled wider. “As it happened, luck was on my side. I found proof that my supervisor had been embezzling funds from several Grayson Group projects. I confronted him with it. He went white, dropped to the floor, and begged me not to expose him.”

My laughter echoed coldly through the pavilion.

“Mr. Grayson-do you know what that bastard said to me when he stole my design?”

Ronan said nothing, as if even breathing had become difficult.

“He told me I should be grateful.” I curled my lip. “He said that without him, someone like me would never have been noticed by anyone who mattered.”

The wolf beneath my skin snarled.

“When I saw him on his knees, I laughed in his face. I ground his pride to dust under my heel, and threw every one of those humiliating words right back at him.”

I drew in a slow breath, savoring the memory.

“But it still wasn’t enough-because by then, the design had already been finalized.”

I raised a single finger. “So I had him prepare two versions. The one I sent up to the president’s office-your office-for approval was flawless. The one I handed to the construction crew was flawed.”

His lips parted soundlessly. I stepped closer.

“Built to those drawings, the structure was bound to collapse mid-construction.”

His face went ghost-white.

“Afterward,” I said calmly, “I burned every flawed copy. The only version left was the one you’d approved- with your signature on it.”

Ronan stared at me as if seeing a monster for the first time. He was shaking violently. He raised a finger to point at me, the hand trembling so hard he could barely lift it.

“Aria... still thinks of you as a friend... you...”

“A friend?” I narrowed my eyes and smiled again. “Mr. Grayson, you still don’t know, do you? Aria and I stopped being friends five years ago.”

Confusion flickered across his face.

“Want to know why?” I asked gently. “Because five years ago, in the last second before the avalanche hit,

she charged up that snow buried slope and saved Damon.”

The next words dropped like poison: “But Damon thought it was me.”

Ronan sucked in a breath.

“Aria was furious. She tried to cut me off. But what had I done wrong?” spread my arms arrogantly. “I just happened to be wearing a bracelet exactly like hers. Damon chose to believe I was his savior.”

My smile grew brighter.

“If she lost her own bracelet, that was her carelessness. Not my fault.”

My wolf let out a vicious laugh.

The weak lose their credit. The clever keep it.

“Oh,” I said softly, “I almost forgot the best part.”

By now Ronan looked half-dead.

His skin had gone gray. His lips wouldn’t stop trembling. Despite the cold, sweat beaded on his forehead. He opened his mouth and couldn’t force out a single word.

All he managed were shallow, broken gasps. The only thing holding him up now was sheer will.

I drank in the sight. Then I bent close to his ear.

“Mr. Grayson,” I whispered, my voice soft and laced with venom, “before Joshua died, I had someone tamper with his car.”

His pupils shook.

“But don’t worry,” I murmured. “You’ll be joining him in hell soon enough.”

My wolf roared with delight.

Finish him.

A satisfied look settled over my face, and reached out to push him over-to let this pitiful old wolf die right here.

Just then, a voice came

“Mr. Grayson! M

It was Laur

My hear

ast of his strength, he gripped the railing of the

<Chapter 128

pavilion and rasped:

“Laurence!”

M

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 132

Claudia’s POV

The moment Laurence saw us, he came rushing over.

I clenched my teeth. “He’s almost here, murmured.

Then adapt, my wolf growled.

In one smooth motion I rushed to Ronan’s side and gripped his arm, as if to steady him. He was weak now, heavy and swaying, drained by grief and shock.

I guided him toward the pavilion steps, playing the part of a concerned bystander. A second before Laurence reached us, my voice turned trembling and sweet.

“Mr. Grayson, are you all right?”

And then I let go on purpose. Ronan lost his balance at once, pitching helplessly forward and crashing down the steps. His forehead struck the stone with a sickening crack.

Blood welled up instantly, sliding down half his face in warm red trails.

My wolf purred.

Beautiful.

“Mr. Grayson!” Laurence cried.

“Mr. Grayson!” I echoed almost in the same breath. To any onlooker I seemed frantic with worry-but no one could smell the triumph deep inside me.

Ronan lay curled on the steps, blood running into his eyes. He was dazed, nearly unconscious. His breathing came shallow and wet, as if even the air had grown too heavy to bear.

Laurence dropped to his side in a panic and lifted him with great care.

“Is anyone there? Help!” His hands shook so badly he nearly dropped his phone as he tried to call for help. I stood beside them, the picture of horror.

Inside, there was no pity at all-only annoyance that the old man hadn’t died sooner.

Then Ronan moved. His hand reached out weakly and caught Laurence’s wrist.

He wanted to speak. His lips worked, pale and trembling, struggling to push out a few words. He wanted to warn him about me.

My wolf bared its teeth.

Don’t let that happen.

Laurence bent down urgently. “Mr. Grayson, what is it?”

Ronan tried again to speak.

Stubborn old fool. I suddenly raised my voice, cutting across them. “Laurence, someone’s coming!”

His head jerked up instinctively.

Then I shouted toward the building. “Over here! Help! Someone’s fallen!”

In the distance, the nurses turned, Laurence threw himself into it too, yelling for help at the top of his lungs.

Ronan’s chance had slipped away. His eyelids fluttered weakly. The last of his strength drained out fast. I watched the life ebb from him behind their backs-slow, and beautiful.

His gaze found me one last time. Even through the blood, even through the fog of fading consciousness, he still knew me.

He understood perfectly that I was the one behind it all. I stood a few feet away, perfectly composed. Then I met his eyes and mouthed the words, soundless.

Mr. Grayson, don’t blame me.

The wolf beneath my skin laughed viciously.

The next second, his eyes rolled back, and he lost consciousness.

Aria's POV

I'd fallen into a deep sleep on the lounge chair during my midday break.

All at once, something seemed to shatter in the very depths of my soul.

The feeling was almost exactly the same as the day Joshua died.

A voice from somewhere deep inside told me: Hurry! Go to the hospital and check on your father!

I jolted awake so violently the chair nearly tipped over beneath me.

"Dad, don't!"

Before I was even fully conscious, a scream tore from my throat. The blanket slid off my shoulders and dropped to the floor. Panic flooded through me; my chest heaved. For a moment I couldn't tell dream from reality.

The wolf inside me churned.

Find him, now!

I looked around in terror, I was still in my father's hospital room.

I flagged a cab and raced to the hospital.

I pressed a trembling hand to my forehead, trying to steady myself, but fear coiled around me like ice.

Ever since his early-release petition had been approved, the nightmares had stopped. I no longer dreamed of the police dragging him away in chains while I stood by, helpless, unable to do a thing.

But today, that old terror was back.

Why now? Why does it feel so real?

My wolf whimpered. Aria, something's wrong. I can feel it.

I forced myself to breathe, then checked the time.

It was nearly afternoon.

+25 Pointa

At this hour, my father should already have finished his treatment-sitting in the living room across from Laurence, a chessboard between them, pretending to sulk every time he wont.

The thought closed my throat. I snatched up the blanket and hurried out.

“Dad...” The living room was empty.

I checked the bathroom, even the reception area. Nothing.

My pulse began to race. “Where would he have gone?” I murmured to myself.

A few days ago, when the snow had begun to melt and the sun returned, my father had said he wanted to take a walk in the garden.

I’d refused. I told him it was too cold, and too dangerous.

My wolf growled low. Maybe that’s where he went.

Could he have gone out with Laurence?

I grabbed my coat and ran for the door. The moment it opened, Laurence was standing there.

His face was ashen, the scent of terror pouring off him.

When he saw me, his eyes filled with tears. “Ms. Grayson...” His voice broke. “Something’s happened to Mr. Grayson.”

The world seemed to stop.

No. No. No...

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Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

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+25 Paints

Aria’s POV

The moment the elevator doors opened, I bolted.

I tore down the corridor toward the emergency room at the far end, my lungs on fire.

Please, let him live.

Please...

I lurched to a stop outside the ER doors, my legs barely holding me, my whole body shaking beyond my control.

Laurence caught up and gripped my arm to steady me, but I could hardly feel him there. It was as if a mountain were pressing down on my chest.

I couldn't breathe. I couldn't think.

Laurence's words kept echoing in my head.

"After his treatment, Mr. Grayson came back and saw you were asleep. He didn't want to wake you... so he asked me to walk him downstairs..."

"He sneezed, so I went back upstairs to get him a shawl..."

"It wasn't even ten minutes..."

"When I found him, he was in the pavilion, talking to a woman... and then he suddenly tumbled down the steps and passed out."

I stared, unblinking, at the red light above the ER doors. I was afraid that if I moved, if I looked away, the doors would open and they'd tell me he was gone.

Time seemed to freeze, and yet to stretch on like an entire century. Then the light went dark.

The doors opened, and a doctor stepped out.

I stumbled forward, desperate to speak, but the tears spilled over before any words could. My throat had closed completely.

I couldn't talk. I could barely breathe.

Laurence asked the question for me.

"Doctor... how is Mr. Grayson?"

Noah pulled down his mask. "Your father is out of danger, for now."

For now. The words cut deep.

“But he hit his head when he fell. There’s a small clot in his brain. We’ll have to watch whether it dissolves on its own—or whether it starts pressing on a nerve.”

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Noah’s eyes were heavy with sorrow. “I’m sorry, Aria. With the medical resources we have here, all we can do for your father right now is keep him stable.”

My legs went weak, the strength left them entirely. Then they wheeled him out-unconscious, his head wrapped in bandages, half his face hidden behind an oxygen mask.

“Dad...” The name came out of me hoarse and broken.

I rushed to the bedside and gripped the rail as they wheeled him toward the ICU. His hand was ice-cold.

My wolf howled in anguish.

Dad, wake up. Wake up, wake up.

Laurence stood behind me, eyes red, drowning in grief, silent.

They moved my father into the ICU. I sat at the bedside and watched him.

His chest rose and fell beneath the blanket, slow and strangely wrong. I hated every second of it.

I hated that mask. I hated the tubes running into him. I hated my own helplessness.

My wolf curled against me, trembling.

We almost lost him, Aria.

I reached out and took my father’s hand, pressing it tight between both of mine. He’d already lost two years. I couldn’t let him lose what was left.

Laurence shifted nearby, trying several times to speak before he finally managed a few words.

“Ms. Grayson... the doctor says he may not wake until tonight. It’s already past noon. Why don’t you eat something?”

“Laurence... I’m not hungry.” My voice came out raw and hollow, as if it no longer belonged to me.

I reached out and gently covered the back of my father's hand with mine. So cold.

I cupped it softly, trying to pass my warmth into him.

My wolf whimpered. Stay with us.

Slowly, the skin beneath my palm began to warm.

Only then did the frantic pounding in my chest ease a little.

My father stirred-just barely. His wrist twitched on its own, as if he could sense me there.

"Dad..." I whispered, tears welling up again.

And that was when I saw it. Something clutched tight in his fist.

I froze.

Carefully, I tried to pry his fingers open, but they wouldn't budge.

Even unconscious, my father held on to it, as if it were something that mattered.

I tried again.

"Ms. Grayson..." Laurence said softly behind me, still urging me to eat

"Laurence, come help me."

He stepped forward at once. When he saw my father's fist, he paused-then understood.

With a firmer grip, he gently worked my father's hand open. Whatever he'd been clutching finally slipped free

Laurence frowned. "Is this... a hospital wristband?"

I stared at it. Inpatient admissions gave one to every patient-a colored paper strip, their name

handwritten on it, so the nurses could identify them quickly.

This one had been torn in two. Only part of two lines of black handwritten letters remained near the tear.

Laurence looked at the band, then at me.

"This must belong to the woman who was talking to Mr. Grayson in the pavilion."

Laurence frowned. “Why would Mr. Grayson be holding a female patient’s wristband?”

My pulse quickened.

The patient’s name began with the letters “CI.”

A single person rose up in my mind.

Comments

Joxe

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 134

Aria’s POV

+25 Poenty

My fingers closed tight around the torn strip of paper. I remernbered everything Laurence had told me.

When my father arrived, there had been a woman at his side.

My wolf snarled.

She did this.

I shot to my feet, the chair scraping across the floor.

“Laurence, I’m stepping out. Stay with my father.”

My voice was no longer hoarse. It was cold.

“If he wakes, tell him I’ll be back soon.”

I went to the security room. The guard on duty recognized me-he’d seen me with Noah before-so when I said I needed the garden footage, he didn’t ask many questions.

He pulled it up at once.

“The pavilion sits in a blind spot,” he explained. “Only this far camera caught any of it, and there’s a tree blocking the view. See if it’s any use to you.”

I barely heard him. My eyes were fixed on the screen.

But the image started to blur.

The guard was baffled. “That system was just upgraded this year-how is this happening?”

The footage was a smear; even zoomed in, the edges only dissolved into more of a mess.

But the two figures in the pavilion were still clear in outline.

One was my father. The other was a woman.

Most people would struggle to recognize her through that blur. But I could pick out her silhouette anywhere in the world.

I clenched my jaw. “Claudia.”

My wolf bared its fangs.

I stared at the screen, stunned. I watched her say something to my father-something that left him shocked, terrified. A few minutes later, Claudia was holding him up, but he swayed, and at last he went down.

I stopped breathing.

This was no accident. It was a shove-timed and angled precisely, then disguised behind the distance.

<Chapter 131-

My legs nearly buckled, but fury held me upright.

+25 Points

A cold sensation spread through my veins in an instant. My hands clenched so hard the torn edge of the wristband sliced into my palm. The pain pierced my skin-and I welcomed it.

I don't remember running down that corridor.

I only remember the rage-the kind that strips a person bare.

The wolf in my mind roared.

Go find her!

Noah caught up. "Aria, are you all right?"

"Claudia... is she in the hospital?"

Noah's voice was quiet. "Yes. I didn't want to tell you-but Damon just rushed over too. Claudia came in to have her ankle looked at."

I closed my eyes briefly, took something from my bag, and slipped it into my pocket.

By the time I reached Claudia's room, my hands were shaking so hard my fingers had gone numb.

Then I kicked the door open. It slammed into the wall hard enough to rattle the frame.

Claudia spun around, startled, anger already rising on her face.

"Who-".

She hadn't finished before I struck her. The slap rang through the room like a gunshot.

Her head snapped to the side. But it wasn't enough.

I hit her again. And again.

Then three more times, every blow loaded with rage.

My palm burned, as if the bones might break.

Claudia staggered back, nearly falling. I advanced on her, my chest heaving, my vision washed red.

"What did you say to my father?" My voice came out savage, broken with grief, raw as if it had been torn

apart.

She lifted her head and recognized me. Fear flickered across her face, then vanished.

"Your father?" she asked softly, a faint smile surfacing beneath her swelling cheek. "You mean Mr. Ronan Grayson?"

I took a step forward. Her smile widened.

"What happened, exactly? Did they fail to save him?" She tilted her head. "You're this angry. I half thought the rescue failed and he was already dead."

My wolf howled.

Rip her throat out.

“But honestly,” Claudia drawled on, “your father’s mental stamina is awfully poor.”

A roar filled my head; I could barely hear anything around me.

I only told him a few interesting little secrets. She listed them off, one by one, like party gossip.

I drew out the recorder I’d tucked into my bag and quietly pressed record.

“How, five years ago, I stole your identity and became Damon’s savior.”

I clenched my teeth.

“How, two years ago, I engineered the Grayson Group accident and put your father in prison.”

My nails dug into my palms.

“And,” she said, eyes gleaming, “how Joshua died.”

Something inside me shattered completely.

“Claudia Stone!”

In an instant, both my hands were around her throat.

My wolf surged to the surface and seized control, pinning her body beneath me.

Then I slammed her into the wall. The impact cracked the plaster.

She gasped in pain-and then she laughed.

My wolf lost control.

Snap her neck.

I bore down harder, my nails biting into both sides of her throat.

Her face flushed scarlet, but the cold sneer never left her lips.

“Does it hurt?” she rasped. “Aria... the more you suffer... the happier I am.”

I pressed harder.

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 135

<Chapter 132-

Aria's POV

"Hahaha-Joshua's dead," she gasped, "and if Ronan dies too... you'll have no family left at all."

"Claudia, you witch!" I shrieked. "Go to hell!"

My wolf's claws sank into her skin, my nails nearly tearing free.

Still she rattled on, because cruelty was all she had left.

"Blame yourself," she choked out. "Back in school, you stole the attention that should have been mine- that's why Wendy killed herself."

Shock loosened my grip for an instant.

"After graduation, you stole the rich life I dreamed of! Why were you spoiled by your father and brother, while I suffered such humiliation?"

She was crying now-but it was rage, not pain.

"Just because I had no powerful family? Why-why?! Your father deserved prison!"

My breathing turned ragged.

"Two months ago, you insisted on reopening the old case-and that's what got Joshua killed! He had it coming too!"

"No!" I smashed her head against the wall.

She grinned, her eyes filling with blood.

"And now you want to take Damon from me too. Why do you always have to take everything away from me?"

She suddenly twisted and reached out. By the time I saw the move, it was too late.

Her hand yanked at the metal IV stand beside us. The pole toppled and struck my wrist.

Pain shot up my arm, and on instinct I let go..

The stand and the glass bottle crashed to the floor, shards spraying across the room.

A sharp fragment bounced up and sliced my neck. Warm blood slid down my skin at once.

The baby in my belly moved, and fear and fury slammed into me at the same time.

Claudia wrenched free, coughing, and lunged for the bed, jabbing the call button again and again.

She turned to look at me, eyes brimming with euphoria. Even now-bloodied, battered-she looked delighted.

The wolf in my mind growled. You're hurt, Aria!

Chapter 132~

Then Claudia charged at me.

"Aria!" she screamed. "If you want to die so badly, then go to hell!"

Something flashed in her hand. A knife.

She came straight at me.

I narrowed my eyes, twisting aside on instinct, reaching for Claudia's wrist-ready to wrench the blade away and drive it back into her throat.

My fingers had almost closed on her hand when she changed direction in a flash.

Chais

Claudia didn't stab me. Instead she seized both my hands and dragged the knife toward her own chest.

A chill went through me.

What is she doing?

And in that moment, someone called my name.

"Aria!"

It was Damon.

That was when I understood. She wanted him to see me as the villain-the one trying to hurt her. If that was what he'd believe, then maybe I should kill her. Maybe, just this once, I should be the villain.

Damon crossed the room at a wolf's speed and caught the knife.

Not the handle-the blade. He caught it barehanded.

The edge sank deep into his palm in an instant. Blood gushed out, hot and bright, soaking the steel and dripping to the floor.

Everyone froze. Except me.

My fury hadn't faded in the slightest.

The killing intent still burned in my eyes. At the sight of the blood, instinct urged me to pull the knife back.

Not to spare him-to punish Claudia.

But Damon tightened his grip on the blade, driving it deeper into his own hand.

More blood poured out.

Claudia gasped theatrically. "Damon!"

Justin shouted too. "Alpha!"

The room was in chaos, but all I could hear was the pounding inside my own skull.

He was bleeding for her.

Once again, he was trying to protect her.

<Chapter 132

Cheth

Even now-with my father's blood staining the hospital flagstones, with my brother already in the ground- he was bleeding to protect Claudia, the very person behind it all.

He stood between me and the woman who had destroyed my family.

Shielding her with his own flesh and blood.

The irony was so thick I nearly laughed out loud.

My wolf spat. Pathetic creature.

Justin moved to step in, but Damon's voice stopped him.

"Justin. Get the doctor."

Claudia covered her mouth, eyes glistening, playing the terrified innocent.

"Damon..."

He didn't look at her. His eyes stayed fixed on me.

Then they dropped to my neck, where the blood from the cut was still plain to see. The wound was shallow; it had nearly stopped bleeding.

His gaze darkened.

"Aria," he said, eyes grim. "Let go."

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 136

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Damon's POV

Aria didn't listen. Her fingers still gripped the handle, knuckles white, shoulders shaking. My blood ran down the blade and dripped slowly to the floor, pooling dark red between us.

But I barely felt the wound. My whole mind was on her.

Claim

Something about Aria's scent was wrong. It wasn't just anger, or grief. She had lost all reason. I could feel it-she was walking straight toward self-destruction.

I sensed that Aria had changed.

Not her eyes, not her body-but... something I couldn't put into words.

It was as if a new bond had formed between her and me-something I couldn't yet see clearly.

The moment I arrived and saw her pointing that knife at Claudia's heart, Rhein erupted inside me.

They're destroying themselves. Look at Aria-she doesn't care whether she lives or dies. She'll spend every last bit of strength, bleed herself dry, just to kill Claudia.

Claudia had done so much evil; she truly deserved to die. I understood Aria completely. I looked into her eyes-rimmed red, swimming with tears, holding back nothing of her grief.

Rhein's voice grew frantic.

You have to stop them now. If no one stops them this instant, they'll die.

My heart dropped, because he was right.

If I'd been a second late, Claudia might already be dead-and Aria would have gone down with her, destroyed by her own mind. She was too pure. Her hands shouldn't be stained with blood.

I gripped the blade tight, ignoring how it cut deeper into my palm.

Aria's lips trembled. She stared at the blood running down my wrist.

At last, she let go and stepped back. I released the knife at the same moment. N clattered to the floor with a sharp ring.

I nearly staggered with relief-not because my hand was free, but because Aria hadn't destroyed herself

Justin and the doctor rushed in.

Claudia stood by the bed, pale and trembling, her eyes locked on my hand.

"Damon! Doctor, hurry!"

The doctor came toward me and froze when he saw the wound. The gash in my palm was deep; pale tissue showed beneath the blood.

He sucked in a sharp breath. I didn't care.

<Chapter 133-

"Check her first. See if she's hurt."

He blinked-clearly thinking I meant Claudia.

Then he followed my gaze to Aria.

Cla

She stood against the wall, breathing hard, a dried streak of blood at her throat. Her wrist was swelling. She was pale, her face full of grief.

She looked utterly broken.

Seeing her, I nearly broke too.

Rhein bowed his head and whimpered in grief.

The doctor hesitated. “Mr. Hawthorne, your hand...”

One look from me was enough. He turned at once and went to Aria.

He said her injuries were minor.

A shallow cut on the neck. A wrist swollen from the impact. No fractures.

But he didn’t truly understand. What she’d been through was anything but minor.

A nurse pressed a cold compress to her wrist.

Aria didn’t react at all. She didn’t speak, and she didn’t look at me.

When the doctor finished, he turned back.

“Mr. Hawthorne, now let me see your hand.”

I held it out. Blood was still dripping from my palm.

The doctor examined the wound, his face going noticeably pale. It had nearly reached the bore

He called for the suture kit and the anesthetic.

“The cut is deep; it needs stitches. I’ll numb it first.”

The nurse came back with the supplies. The doctor carefully prepared the injection.

“The anesthetic will last about six hours. Once it wears off, there may still be pain. If you need it, I can write a prescription...”

“No anesthetic. Just stitch it.”

The room went silent.

The doctor stared at him. “Mr. Hawthorne... without anesthetic, it will be excruciating.”

He was telling the truth. The palm is dense with nerves; even a paper cut can leave an ordinary person aching for days. But I’m not ordinary. I’m an Alpha-my wolf can heal me easily enough. I just didn’t want it

<Chapter 133-

Hooked past him, to Aria. She was sitting now, silent, her gaze hollow and fixed on nothing.

I thought of the brother she’d lost, and the father lying unconscious.

The years stolen from her family.

Next to that, what was a little pain in my hand?

I met the doctor’s eyes.

“It’s fine.”

He stored the anesthetic and set it aside. Then he aimed the first needle at my torn palm.

“Mr. Hawthorne... may I begin?”

I said nothing. He understood.

The needle went in. A jolt of heat shot through my hand and crawled up my arm. Again and again, I welcomed that heat.

Sixteen stitches in all, the thread binding my flesh together, blood staining the doctor’s gloves and the steel instruments.

I didn’t make a sound. I only listened to Aria’s breathing from the far side of the room.

Every pass of the needle was like repaying a debt I could never settle.

When it was over, the doctor looked at me with something close to awe.

I felt only emptiness.

Clas

The nurse wrapped my hand in gauze. The doctor gave me instructions about eating, drinking, resting, and limiting the use of my right hand.

“Justin, see the doctor out.”

He obeyed at once. The doctor wiped the cold sweat from his brow and seemed about to refuse, but Justin laid a hand on his shoulder, leaving him no choice.

The door closed behind them.

Silence.

Only three people were left in the room.

Aría, Claudia, and me.

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

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Damon's POV

Claim

Claudia threw herself at me, both arms locking around my neck, her body trembling, tears spilling as if she'd just escaped death itself. The scent of terror poured off her.

Fury blazed up in me.

Rhein bared his teeth.

She's faking those tears again.

I used my uninjured left hand to pry her arms loose and pushed her back.

“Damon!” she cried. “Thank god you came. If it weren't for you, Aria would have killed me!”

My jaw tightened.

“I was just resting in my room when Aria burst in and slapped me again and again. She demanded to know what I'd said to her father. I told her I'd never even met Mr. Ronan

Grayson, but somehow I'd set her off. She grabbed me by the throat and pinned me to the wall."

She touched her own neck theatrically.

"I could barely breathe. Then I broke free of the IV stand. I tried to run for help, but Aria pulled out a knife..."

She broke into sobs.

"She tried to stab me! I almost died, Damon! I was terrified. I thought I'd never see you again!"

Her voice cracked.

I barely heard any of it. My eyes had long since moved past her.

Aria stood not far away.

Silent, rigid, her eyes empty.

The scene from a few minutes ago still hung in my mind: the knife in her hand, the wild, reckless fury on

her face.

In that moment, my heart had seemed to stop. No one knew how many possibilities had flashed through my mind in those few short seconds.

If Aria had stabbed Claudia and Claudia survived, I would have buried the truth with witnesses and money. If necessary, I'd have found someone to take the blame in my place.

If Aria had killed Claudia...

Rhein didn't hesitate. We'll protect Aria with our lives.

That's right. I would clean the scene myself. Justin would get Aria out of the country before sunrise, and I would make sure the truth stayed buried forever.

And if Aria had died for it-if Claudia had somehow overpowered and killed her...

Chann

+ closed my eyes briefly. I couldn't imagine how I'd live out the rest of my life. Because there would be no

life left to live,

Thank God I'd stepped in when I did, and stopped all of it.

I walked toward Aria. On instinct, I wanted to pull her into my arms.

But as I drew close, she stepped back, putting distance between us.

My chest clenched.

Rhein growled low.

She hates you now.

My eyes dimmed. Does she understand what would have happened if I hadn't stopped her?

Does she know I just pulled her back from ruin?

In that moment fury rose in me-not at her hatred, but at her recklessness.

If she'd killed Claudia, it would have scarred her soul.

I crossed the room in a few strides, letting my presence fill it without effort.

My voice came out rough. "Aria... don't you have anything to say to me?"

She lifted her head, her eyes meeting mine. For an instant, I thought she saw straight through me. I thought she saw the pain in me, the fear, the helpless love.

But then the ice sealed over her expression again.

"Mr. Hawthorne," she said coldly, "why do you always ask the same question? I'm sick of hearing it.*

Every word was sharp as a blade. I understood her meaning.

Every time she and Claudia clashed, I'd demanded to know why. I'd always taken Claudia's side. My heart ached. How ignorant I'd been, back then.

I stepped closer, ignoring the distance she was trying to keep.

I looked down at her, trying to find her beneath the coldness, the anger, the wounds she'd given herself.

And then I made her the vow I should have made long ago.

“Believe me, Aria.”

My throat tightened.

“From now on... whatever you say, I’ll believe it.”

Aria’s POV

<Chapter 134-

Damon’s words struck something deep in me. I stared at him blankly for a moment.

My wolf went quiet.

Would he believe me now? After everything?

ClaimC

I saw something raw in his eyes. I saw pain, regret, longing. Once, those things might have plunged me into despair. Not anymore.

I turned my face away.

Damon’s promise meant nothing now-because it was too late to undo anything.

Too late, my wolf whispered in anguish.

But for some reason, I still wanted to test it.

I turned to Claudia, a smile curving my lips.

“Whatever I say?” I asked Damon softly. “You’ll believe me?”

Then I pointed at Claudia.

“What if I said everything she just told you is a lie? That she choked me first, slapped me first, and then tried to stab me with that knife?”

“What if I said it was Claudia-your savior-who killed my father and my brother?”

Claudia’s expression turned complicated in an instant-shock, fury, and panic all tangled together.

“Aria!” she screamed. “You liar! It was you! You hit me, you choked me, you tried to kill me!”

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<Chapter 135-

Aria's POV

I pulled out the torn fragment of the "CI" wristband and held it up to her. "Let me see your wristband, Claudia. This was found in my father's hand!"

But Claudia instantly raised the intact band on her own wrist. "Aria! You'd use some ruined scrap of a wristband to frame me-how could you!"

I looked at that perfect, unbroken band, and a chill ran through me.

I hadn't expected it-Claudia had come prepared too.

"Aria, I understand how you feel, but you need evidence for these things, not slander!"

Clann

Claudia stroked the marks on her own throat and wailed, "Aria! How could I possibly kill anyone? I can't even beat you!"

I tilted my head. "Do you have proof?"

She froze. Then she spun around and threw herself into Damon's arms. "Damon! The marks on my throat! The handprints on my face! My ankle's still not healed! How could I possibly murder an old man-"

Yes. I'd left those marks. I'd spent every ounce of strength doing it. I stepped closer, feigning interest, and studied the bruises carefully.

Then I laughed softly.

"How convenient. That way, any wound you inflict on yourself becomes evidence-and you get to dress yourself up as the victim?"

A look of dawning realization crossed her face.

"You think I did this to myself?" she demanded sharply. "Are you insane? How could I ever-"

“Why couldn’t you?”

I let my gaze settle meaningfully on the bandage wound around her ankle.

“You’ve hurt yourself before. That’s why you were brought here in the first place, isn’t it?”

Claudia’s breathing turned ragged.

“So you slapping yourself, choking yourself, wounding yourself over and over... it’s hardly surprising.”

My wolf let out a grim laugh.

Twist the knife.

“Aria, you’re talking pure nonsense!”

Her rage fed something rotten deep inside me. Then she turned to Damon in desperation.

“Damon, please believe me! Everything I said is true! She did it! Aria wanted to kill me!”

She reached out to grab his arm, but he stepped aside.

Her hand hung in the air.

The look on her face nearly made me laugh. I could feel the darkness spreading inside me.

Ch

It flowed through my chest like black water-cold, and endless. I lowered my lashes and finally looked at Damon.

“Mr. Hawthorne,” I said, expressionless, “do you still believe what I say?”

His eyes locked on mine. My faintly mocking smile was reflected in them.

He clenched his jaw. “Do you really have to do this?”

The words almost made me laugh out loud.

Do I have to do this? Do I have to be cruel?

Yes, Because when I was gentle, no one listened to me.

Because kindness only made me easier to destroy.

Because he believed Claudia every single time.

Memories came flooding back, slamming into me one after another.

Damon doubting my account, choosing Claudia's tears over my truth.

Watching the one I loved trampled into the ground-those memories would never fade.

And now here he stood before me, offering trust like some precious gift.

Trust-now that my heart was ash, now that fury had swallowed me whole, now that nothing could be

saved.

In that moment I realized I didn't care at all what his answer would be. If he said he believed me, Claudia

would suffer for it.

If he said he didn't, then his own promise would turn to poison in his mouth,

Either way, someone would bleed.

And this time, I felt that was enough.

I lifted my chin and looked straight into Damon's eyes. "Yes," I answered firmly. "I have to."

I switched off the recorder in my pocket.

Now was not the time to make it public.

Without the slightest hesitation, he spoke in a low, heavy voice-a voice that might once have healed me

"All right," Damon said. "I believe you."

<Chapter 135-

But I stayed perfectly calm throughout.

Somments

Vote

Glam

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 139

Aria's POV

"Very well, Mr. Hawthorne. Tunderstand how you think."

I didn't want to see either of them again, and I turned to leave.

Damon never said a single word the entire time

Not far off, Noah stood quietly at the corner.

It seemed he'd been waiting there for me for a long time.

The hospital's air conditioning was turned up high, and a thin mist had fogged his lenses.

He came to my side, his eyes seeming to see through everything.

He took out a bandage and carefully tended to my wound.

"Aria, I've been waiting for you to say those words."

"Take me away, Noah."

Clas

Noah raised an eyebrow, a flicker of excitement in his eyes. "Ready whenever you are. What do you need me to arrange? As for your father, I'll have him escorted to Whitemoon territory by helicopter."

He held my hand gently, his voice earnest. "Trust me-trust my pack. We will heal your father, I promise."

"I've already filed a request with the prison for remote medical care."

A day passed.

Noah told me everything was ready; he could take me away anytime.

And on that same day, I accepted the company's overseas assignment.

As it happened, the posting was located right within Whiternoon Pack territory.

That eased my mind a little-this way I could look after my father more easily.

I sent secret emails to Peggy and Astrid, the friends closest to me, telling them I was going abroad to study for a few years.

I didn't reveal anything more detailed.

I didn't want Damon to track me down through them.

Better that Damion never find me at all, for as long as this lasted.

I had to make sure the child in my belly was safe.

I touched my stomach, and thought of the child's father.

I thought of everything that had passed-how he'd shielded Claudia, how he'd never trusted me.

decided this farce should pause here, at least for now.

I gently pressed send.

I'd edited the recording from that day, keeping only the truth that it was I who saved Damon in the avalanche.

In the recording, Claudia had confessed to nearly everything.

But I couldn't release all of it.

I would wait for the right moment-perhaps in the not-too-distant future.

I would make Claudia pay a terrible price.

Seven days from now, at eight in the evening, Damon would see this evidence.

And I would be gone from this place-this country that had brought me nothing but tears.

Damon's POV

I realized something was wrong a few days later.

I'd finished reading my subordinate's report.

To be precise, the surveillance report on Aria.

Aria seemed to have vanished.

A flicker of foreboding crossed my heart.

Rhein sneered. You never treasured her! Panicking now is laughable, my poor Alpha!

Is it my fault?

No. Now wasn't the time to dwell on right and wrong.

I knew Aria wouldn't leave-her father still needed treatment.

The thought eased my mind considerably.

The daylight slowly dimmed.

The clock read eight.

A message suddenly arrived in my inbox-from Aria.

A recording.

A video.

I was about to open it.

Justin's emergency call came through.

I frowned if it weren't urgent, Justin would never use the emergency line.

<Chapter 136-

"What's happened?"

Clas

"Alpha! Miss Aria is leaving! She's accepted an overseas assignment! And more than that-the Alpha of

the Whitemoon Pack is at her side."

An assignment-probably only a couple of weeks.

"Keep watching her. It's nothing important."

“No! No, Alpha! Listen to me! This isn’t a simple assignment! It’s a long one-five months! And the Whitemoon Pack went over our guards’ heads, filed for remote medical authority, and took old Grayson away!”

“Where is Aria now? Where are they?”

Something dawned on me, and my whole body went cold in an instant.

No. It can’t be. Aria wouldn’t leave.

“The airport. Miss Aria-she didn’t buy a return ticket.”

I spun the wheel at once and drove for the airport.

On the way, I went to open the recording Aria had sent me.

But something seemed to be jamming the video’s loading; no matter how long I waited, it wouldn’t play.

What is this?

I was still puzzling over it.

“BAM-” My car took a hit.

My forehead slammed into the steering wheel.

Blood sprayed.

“Damn it!” I looked through the rearview mirror, teeth clenched-a silver SUV had rammed into my rear bumper.

Then the silver SUV shot past me and vanished down the fork in the road ahead.

Something was wrong.

I suddenly heard a beeping from the back of the car-beep, beep.

On instinct, I gripped my phone and threw myself out of the car.

“BANG—

The explosions came one after another.

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 140

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Damon's POV

My ears could hardly register any sound at all.

The reek of blood spread into my nose.

I could even feel my wolf slipping into dormancy,

Silence. A long, long silence.

After a while, I woke from unconsciousness.

Blood blurred my vision.

My first thought was: I want to find Aria. I have to find her.

I can't let her leave.

I dragged my body, crawling along the empty road, until my strength gave out.

Tears mixed with blood ran into my mouth.

I couldn't move anymore.

My fingers closed around my phone, and with the last of my strength, I pressed the recording open.

But the voice that came out wasn't Aria's.

"Five years ago, this is how I stole her identity and became the one who saved your life."

Claudia's smug tone was like a blade dipped in ice, sinking inch by inch into my heart.

What...

My breath stopped. Blood was still flowing out of me, but in that moment, something colder than blood loss crawled up my spine.

So the one who charged into the avalanche to save me five years ago-it had been Aria all along, from the very beginning.

I'd gotten it wrong. For five whole years, I'd mistaken someone else for my savior-and hurt her for it. doubted her, pushed her away, again and again.

The wolf inside me let out a faint, broken sigh. He hurt, he raged, he wanted to tear free of this ruined body, shift, and run into the forest to bite and kill until nothing was left. But he couldn't move. Neither of us could.

Above me, a plane swept past, the roar of its engines pressing down, making the ground tremble.

I knew it carried the only person I'd ever loved in this life-flying toward a distance I could never reach

again.

Chapter 137-

On that empty road, my crying rose up

It was the cry of an Alpha wolf-despairing, full of regret, a cry that could never call anything back.

Noah's POV

I listened quietly to my subordinate's report, Aria asleep at my side.

Charty

"Damon was in a car accident. He's critically injured and unconscious-in the hospital now, his life hanging in the balance."

"Mm. Good work. You can keep pushing the port-ownership project forward. I want to see the contract on my study desk by tomorrow."

I hung up and gently drew the blanket over Aria.

I gazed at her in silence, wanting to make up for all the years that had been lost.

In the beginning, I approached Aria for one reason: to contest port ownership against the Hawthorne family.

I feel a touch of guilt. I used her.

I used Aria, the one and only weakness of the Alpha of the Silvermoon Pack.

That seemingly unbreakable Damon had his mind thrown into disorder because of my interference.

Add to that a few “coincidental” car accidents.

With a bomb thrown in as a bonus.

I never meant for Damon to die only to teach him a lesson.

And to take the port project along the way, expanding our territory.

As for the evidence Aria sent him, I had my people intercept and jam it mid-transmission. Until I’m ready that recording and video can never reach him intact.

Now, everything is unfolding exactly as I planned.

As for Aria, I’ll make it up to her. I’ll make it up to her with all my heart.

And with all an Alpha’s devotion, I’ll treat her as my one and only Luna if she’s willing.

But my wolf sneered. How frightening. You actually care for her? Even though your fated mate is someone else entirely.

So what?

I’ve always ignored the rules.

Because I am the rule.

Char

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 141

Aria’s POV

The day of my prenatal checkup finally arrived.

After the examination, the doctor smiled, “The pup is healthy. Everything looks perfect-though the pup is developing a little slowly.”

Relief flooded through me. “Thank you, Doctor.”

She reminded me to rest, avoid stress, then handed me the report. I slipped it into my bag.

Our little one is doing well, Lydia purred.

“I know.”

Once Walter’s side finalized the divorce paperwork and sent it back, everything would finally be over.

No more Damon, no more Hawthorne family. Just me and my pup.

But the moment I stepped out of the hospital, unease settled in my chest.

Several days had passed. I had met with Walter before I left and he had promised the divorce would be finalized quickly.

So why hadn’t he contacted me?

Something’s wrong, Lydia whispered,

“Maybe the paperwork is delayed.”

Even as I said it, I didn’t believe it.

A television in the lobby suddenly switched to a breaking news report.

“Breaking news! Hawthorne Group CEO and Silvermoon Pack Alpha Damon Hawthorne was involved in a serious car accident several days ago...”

I stopped cold.

“The accident happened on the way to the airport. Witnesses reported a massive explosion after the crash...”

The rest of the report blurred. My bag slipped from my hands. My heart slammed against my ribs.

Our mate... Lydia gasped.

Noah caught me before I lost my balance.

“Aria

I stared at the burning wreckage on the screen.

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It couldn't be real.

Noah studied my face. "You're thinking of going back."

I opened my mouth but no words came out.

Only days ago, all I wanted was freedom.

Now...Everything had changed.

My chest tightened.

I can't feel Rhein, Lydia whispered in panic.

Neither could I.

The mate bond had become frighteningly faint.

Then my phone rang. Walter Hawthorne.

I answered after a long pause.

"Hello?"

Claders

"Aria." His voice was hoarse. "I know I have no right to ask this." He fell silent before speaking again. "But please... come see Damon."

I shut my eyes. "I don't think that's necessary."

"It is." His voice cracked. "If you ever cared about him. He paused, then added. "I'm begging you. He may not have much time."

The call ended. I stared at the screen.

Noah immediately shook his head.

"Don't go. He might just be manipulating you."

I frowned.

"You think this accident is fake?"

"The divorce has stalled for days," Noah said grimly. "Then suddenly Damon has a terrible accident? Doesn't that sound suspicious?"

I bit my lip.

“He now knows you’re leaving. If you go back...”

His eyes hardened, “he may never let you leave again.”

He wasn’t wrong. It sounded exactly like Damon.

Possessive. Controlling

What if Walter is lying? I wondered.

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Lydia growled. You don’t believe that.

I didn’t know what to believe.

Go back!

Her panic slammed into me so hard that pain shot through my lower abdomen.

I sucked in a breath.

“Aria!” Noah steadied me. “Are you alright?”

I nodded. “I’m fine.”

I wasn’t fine. Lydia’s anxiety was affecting our pup.

Please, she begged. We need to make sure he’s alive.

Clair

I closed my eyes. She was right. This wasn’t about love or forgiveness. I just needed the truth about his health status.

Without it, Lydia and I won’t have peace.

I opened my eyes. “I’m going.”

Noah sighed. “Aria...”

I raised a hand.

“I’m not taking him back. I’m not stopping the divorce. I’m only seeing him once.”

“When I know the truth...I’ll leave. I promise.”

He searched my face before finally nodding. “I’ll come with you.”

Relief washed through me. “Thank you.”

We went to the car park. He had barely pulled out his car keys when his phone rang.

His expression changed instantly. “What happened?”

He listened in silence.

When the call ended, his face was grim,

“My pack needs me. It’s urgent.”

I forced a smile.

“No problem. I’ll go alone.”

He caught my wrist. “If anything feels wrong... Leave immediately. Don’t let Damon manipulate you.”

‘I won’t’

He released me reluctantly. “Call me when you arrive.”

will.”

Clam

Later that day, I stood outside Silvermoon Pack Hospital.

My pulse quickened. Walter was already waiting.

The moment he saw me, relief crossed his exhausted face.

“You came.”

“I only came to confirm whether he’s really hurt.”

A bitter smile touched his lips. “I understand.”

Without another word, he led me upstairs. The entire top floor was guarded by Hawthorne guards.

The silence was suffocating. Walter stopped outside the intensive care unit.

After a long pause, he pushed the door open. I stepped inside.

Then i saw Damon. I stopped breathing.

He lay completely still. Bandages covered almost his entire body. Tubes and monitors surrounded him.

His face was bruised, pale, and covered with cuts. Even his Alpha aura had faded until it was barely there.

I couldn't move.

This... This wasn't a lie.

Rhein... Lydia whispered, her voice breaking.

My chest tightened.

The Alpha who had always seemed invincible now looked as though death was waiting at his bedside.

Vole

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Chapter 142

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Aria's POV

Walter's words hit me like a blow.

"What did you say?"

He looked years older, his shoulders heavy with grief.

Claim

"When our men reached the mountain road, Damon's car had already crashed." His voice turned hoarse. "It exploded just as they arrived. He was still inside."

Mate... Lydia whimpered.

I clenched my fists, refusing to let my heart soften.

Walter looked at Damon. "His phone was destroyed in the blast."

The doctor stepped forward and opened Damon's chart.

"The blast shattered several ribs, damaged his lungs, caused severe internal bleeding, and left extensive burns. An Alpha's healing can only do so much. His wolf has exhausted nearly all his strength trying to keep Damon alive."

Rhein... Lydia murmured sadly.

"The injuries exceed even an Alpha's healing ability," the doctor continued. "We've done everything we can. Whether he survives now depends on his wolf."

I looked at Damon.

Bandages covered almost every inch of him. Cuts scarred his face. His skin was ghostly pale, and the steady rhythm of the machines breathed in his place.

The Alpha who had once seemed invincible now looked frighteningly fragile.

"There is one more thing," the doctor said.

Walter looked over immediately.

"What?"

The doctor glanced at me.

"Even unconscious, Damon keeps calling your name."

My breath caught.

"He whispers it constantly. His wolf is searching for its mate."

Rhein is calling us, Lydia whispered.

"We believe the mate bond is the only thing keeping his consciousness anchored," the doctor said "If the

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bend can be reopened, even briefly, it may awaken his wolf. If his wolf wakes, Damon has a chance.”

Reopen the mate bond?

Before I could answer a furious scream echoed outside.

“I want to see Damon!”

Claudia. The ward doors flew open. She stormed toward us, flanked by bodyguards.

“You can’t keep me out!”

Walter stepped in front of the door. “No.”

Claudia glared at him. “Move,”

“I said no.” Walter’s eyes turned icy.

“You can’t stop me!”

A wave of Alpha pressure rolled from Walter, forcing everyone outside to lower their heads. Even Claudia staggered back.

“As long as I am here, no one goes near my grandson. Especially you.”

“You can’t do that, Walter!”

“Remove her.”

The guards dragged her away despite her screams.

“Please... I need to see Damon! I just want to see high!”

Her voice faded down the corridor until silence returned.

Walter turned back to me. Then, to my shock, he bowed.

“Aria... I’m begging you. Save Damon.”

I instinctively stepped back.

“You’ve come to the wrong person.”

“I know.” His voice was heavy with regret. “You owe us nothing. But I can’t lose my grandson.”

He's dying, Lydia whispered.

I know.

He's still our mate.

I shut her out.

The doctor spoke again. "Before you decide, you need to understand something. If the mate bond is reopened, you'll temporarily share your senses,"

< Chapter 139—

Clam

I frowned. "What does that mean?"

"You'll feel each other's emotions. Thoughts. Pain." He hesitated. "Damon will basically sense everything about you."

My blood ran cold. My hand flew to my stomach.

The pup.

He'll know, Lydia said anxiously.

No. Y can't let him find out.

Walter watched me, and after a moment, he spoke.

"As former head of the Hawthorne family, I still possess the Hawthorne crest."

I frowned.

"It was my authority that sealed your marriage. The same authority can dissolve it."

I stared at him.

"When Damon recovers, if you still wish to leave, I'll personally remove the Hawthorne seal. You'll be free."

Freedom. I'd wanted that for so long. I turned my gaze to Damon, lying on the bed.

If he died, Lydia would lose her mate. The backlash would tear through both of us.

And our pup, Lydia whispered.

My hand tightened over my stomach.

No matter how badly I wanted Damon to remain ignorant of this child...

If he died, our baby would suffer anyway.

I closed my eyes. When I opened them again, my decision was made.

"I'll save him."

Relief flashed across Walter's face.

"But I have one condition."

"Name it."

I met his eyes. "If I reopen the mate bond and Damon survives, the moment he wakes up, you will dissolve our marriage."

Walter looked a bit sad. "You want the Hawthorne crest used immediately."

"Yes. I don't want this to drag on any longer. I want it to be done immediately."

My hand unconsciously rested over my stomach.

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"If it doesn't, Damon will never let me go."

Lydia's voice was quiet. Neither will Rhein.

Walter nodded without hesitation. "Agreed."

"Your marriage was sealed with the Hawthorne crest. It will end the same way."

His voice was firm.

Claim

"The moment Damon wakes, I'll affix the Hawthorne crest to the divorce contract. It won't require going to the courthouse to finalize the paperwork. Once the crest is sealed, the contract becomes effective immediately."

I felt a rush of relief.

Freedom. It was finally within reach.

My eyes drifted to Damon, lying unconscious on the hospital bed.

Lydia, I am sorry.

I know. My wolf's voice was soft with sorrow.

Let's save our mate and then leave him forever.

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 143

Damon's POV

Darkness swallowed everything. No pain, no sound, no scent, only endless black.

Damon... The voice echoed through the void.

"Rhein?" Silence.

Then the world exploded into white.

Snow. Ice. A freezing wind tore across my face, and I couldn't breathe. My body was trapped beneath tons of snow.

Every broken bone burned. Blood soaked into the ice beneath me!

I knew this place. Five years ago. The avalanche.

We're dying, Rhein rasped inside my head.

"I know."

I tried to move. Nothing. "So... this is the end..."

Then a sweet scent cut through the storm.

Rhein froze.

Footsteps. Someone was approaching, stumbling through the snow toward me.

"No!" A voice screamed my name. "Damon!"

My heart lurched. It was Aria, not Claudia. Aria.

She collapsed beside me, tears freezing on her cheeks. "I found you..." She clawed at the snow with her bare hands. She never stopped. She dug. She cried. She called my name.

My breath caught. "It... it was you..."

Everything shattered within me. It had always been Aria.

She held me. She wrapped herself around me to keep me warm. She whispered over and over.

"Don't die. You have to survive."

How... How did I get it so wrong?

Because we were very weak, we never saw her face, Rhein said bitterly. We were already losing consciousness.

Five years. Five years spent loving the wrong woman. Protecting the wrong woman. Destroying the right

one

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Aria smiled. "I've got you now."

She pulled and failed. Pulled again. Again. Again.

Then the snow gave way. Air rushed into my lungs.

She laughed through her tears. "You'll live. I know you will."

Cla

The world blurred. The snow vanished. Now we stood beneath the Silvermoon Pack's sacred Moon Tree.

Moonlight bathed Aria. She looked beautiful.

I reached for her. "Aria..."

She smiled sadly. "I have to go."

"No." I grabbed for her. "You can't."

"I have to."

“You belong with me.”

“Not anymore.”

Panic exploded inside me. “No!” I lunged. My hand passed through her like smoke.

She stepped back. Then another. Farther.

“Aria! Don’t leave me!”

Rhein burst from the darkness. My wolf threw back his head. A broken howl ripped across the sky.

Awooooo! Come back! Mate! Please! He whimpered in my head.

Chase after her.

I did. No matter how fast I ran, she drifted farther away.

“Aria! I remember! I know the truth! I’m sorry! I’m so sorry!” I begged.

She never looked back.

Then warmth. A tiny thread brushed against my soul, soft and familiar, like sunlight after an endless winter.

Rhein stopped. Wait... Do you feel that?

I did. The mate bond, warm and alive.

Damon... Her voice. Aria. She was calling me.

The warmth wrapped around my chest. The pain faded.

Then I sensed something else. A presence around her.

Rhein inhaled sharply. Can you feel that?

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“Yes. What is it?”

“I don’t know. He sounded confused. But... it’s important.

Longing flooded my chest. An instinct so fierce it stole my breath.

Before Rhein or I could make sense of it, Aria's voice came again.

"Damon... Come back."

Everything shattered. My eyes immediately flew open. The first thing I saw... was her. Aria.

She stood beside my hospital bed. She was real. Relief hit so hard it hurt.

My trembling hand reached for hers. "Aria..."

She stiffened.

"I remember. I remember everything."

A faint crease formed between her brows.

Emotion closed around my throat. "It was you. You saved me. It was never Claudia. I remember the avalanche." Tears blurred my vision. "I was such a fool."

"I'm sorry. I hurt you. I chose the wrong person. I made you suffer all this time."

She only looked at me, silent and cold.

I tightened my grip. "I know the truth now, Aria. We can start over. We'll fix this. You came back." I smiled bitterly. "You still love me. I know you do."

She gently pulled her hand away. "No, I don't love you anymore, Damon."

I stopped breathing. Those words shattered me.

"I saved your life so our divorce could proceed without regret and I could have my freedom."

Every word drove the knife deeper.

"I won't accept that. I'll never divorce you. I won't let you go."

Rhein snarled. She's our mate. Fight for her.

Aria calmly reached into her bag. She placed the divorce document on my blanket. I looked down. My blood froze.

The Hawthorne family crest. Sealed in crimson wax. Impossible.

She met my eyes. "Grandfather agreed."

“No.”

“This marriage was approved by the Hawthorne family head.” She tapped the crimson seal. “And that same authority could also end it.”

My mind went blank.

~”It already bears Walter Hawthorne’s official crest. It no longer needs any further court processes. It

became legally binding the moment the seal was affixed.”

I couldn’t breathe.

Claim

“I made a bargain with him. I would save your life, and in return...” Her voice never wavered. “You would let me go. You would never entangle me again.”

Silence swallowed the room. I stared at the scarlet crest. It looked like fresh blood. Like the Moon Goddess herself had passed judgment.

My heart broke.

Rhein let out a shattered whine. No... She can’t leave... Not again...

I looked at Aria. The mate who had saved me. The mate I had betrayed. The mate... I didn’t ever want to lose.

L

M

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

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Aria’s POV

The silence in the room lasted only a heartbeat.

Then Damon suddenly snatched the divorce agreement from the bed.

His fingers shook violently.

“No.” His voice was rough. “I won’t accept this.”

Before I could react, the papers split apart in his hands.

Rrrrip!

Again. Again. Again.

Chr

He tore every page into tiny pieces until white scraps fluttered through the room like dying snowflakes.

His breathing became ragged. “I won’t divorce you.”

Lydia let out a quiet sigh. He still doesn’t understand.

No, he doesn’t.

I looked calmly into Damon’s frantic eyes. “It doesn’t matter.”

His expression froze. “What?”

“The divorce contract became effective the moment Walter stamped it with the Hawthorne family crest.”

I glanced at the shredded paper scattered across the floor.

“You can tear it into a million pieces. It changes nothing. The marriage is already dissolved.”

His pupils contracted. “No.”

“It is.”

“No!” Damon shook his head over and over.

“I don’t believe it. You came back. You risked your life for me.”

His eyes locked onto mine with desperate certainty. “You still love me.”

I almost laughed, and that was not because it was funny, but because it hurt too much.

There had been a time... A single sentence like that would have made my entire world light up.

Now... It barely stirred anything inside me.

‘You’ve mistaken something again.’

His face paled.

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Cisim

came because of Walter. Saving your life was part of my agreement with him. I fulfilled my promise, and now we’re finished.”

“No.”

He threw the blanket aside. Ignoring the tubes still attached to his arm, he stumbled out of bed.

“Damon. Don’t.”

He didn’t listen. He took one step. Then another

He closed the distance between us before I could retreat.

His hands gripped my shoulders.

“I won’t lose you.” His voice cracked. “Not after I finally remembered.”

His eyes searched mine desperately. “We can begin again. I’ll make everything right.”

“I’ll spend the rest of my life making up for everything. I swear it.”

My chest tightened.

This was everything I’d wanted to hear, but it was several years too late.

Lydia whimpered softly. If only...

No. I hardened my heart.

“There is no beginning left for us.”

He stared at me.

Then suddenly... His hand cupped my face.

“Aria...”

Before I realized what he intended...

He lowered his head. His lips were only inches away.

My eyes widened. “No!” I shoved against his chest. “Damon!”

He refused to let go.

f

“I love you. I always should have loved you. I’ll never let you leave again.” His scent surrounded me.

I struggled harder. “Let me go!”

His grip tightened instinctively.

Then a sharp pain stabbed low in my abdomen.

“Ah...” My breath caught. The pain wasn’t unbearable. But it was enough.

My hands flew instinctively to my stomach.

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My pup.

Lydia immediately rose inside me. Protect the little one!

Every instinct screamed the same command.

Damon froze. His face drained of color.

“Aria?”

His eyes dropped to where I was holding my abdomen.

“Did I hurt you?” His voice trembled.

The panic in his eyes was real. He immediately released me.

“I’m sorry. I’m sorry... I wasn’t thinking.”

He reached toward my stomach without hesitation.

“Let me see. Are you injured? Does it hurt?”

Fear exploded through me.

No! If he touched me... He would feel the tiny life growing inside me...

Lydia snarled. Don't let him touch us! He'll know!

Before his hand reached me, I caught his wrist.

His fingers stopped only inches away from my stomach.

“No.”

He blinked. “Aria...”

“Don't touch me.”

His brows knitted together. “I just want to make sure you're alright.”

“I'm fine.”

“But you're in pain.”

“I said I'm fine.” I tightened my grip. “So don't come any closer.”

His hand slowly lowered. Confusion flickered across his face.

Something felt wrong to him. I could see it. His wolf could probably sense my heartbeat racing.

But before he could question it...

Bang!

The ward door burst open. A familiar voice cried out dramatically

“Damon!”

Claudia. She rushed inside with tears streaming down her cheeks.

“Damon!”

She threw herself toward him. “was so worried!”

“I thought I’d lost you!” She clung to his arm as though she belonged there.

Claim

“I’ve been praying every day! I couldn’t eat! I couldn’t sleep! I thought the Moon Goddess was taking you away from me!”

I watched her quietly. Completely expressionless.

I felt no anger. No jealousy or heartbreak.

Nothing.

Lydia noticed it too. Look at us. We’re not hurting anymore.

I looked at Claudia’s tear-streaked face. The woman I’d once envied. The woman Damon had defended over me countless times. The woman who had stolen five years of my marriage.

Seeing her cling to him... didn’t hurt anymore. Not even a little. I was truly free.

Claudia buried her face against Damon’s shoulder. “Damon... I knew you’d wake up... I never stopped believing...”

“Get off me.” His voice was ice.

Claudia froze. “What?”

The next second...

Boom!

The room exploded with terrifying Alpha pressure. The force crashed through the ward like an invisible tidal wave.

The windows rattled. Medical equipment shook violently. Even the air itself seemed to grow heavy.

Every instinct inside my wolf urged submission.

Lydia braced herself immediately. Rhein... He’s furious.

Fortunately, I had once been Luna of the Silvermoon Pack. My wolf had long since learned how to withstand Damon’s Alpha aura.

Claudia wasn’t nearly as fortunate. Her knees buckled instantly.

“No.” She crashed onto the floor with a painful thud. “Ah!” Her face turned deathly pale.

“D-Damon...” She struggled to breathe beneath the crushing weight of his dominance.

“You... you’re hurting

me..”

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His golden Alpha eyes blazed with fury. “I know.” His voice was terrifyingly calm. “I know everything.”

Claudia’s face emptied of all color. “What... what do you mean?”

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

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Claum

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Aria’s POV

Claim

“I remembered.” Damon’s gaze was murderous. “The avalanche. The woman who saved me. It wasn’t you.”

Silence. Claudia’s lips trembled. “I... Damon... I...”

“You lied to me. You stole Aria’s place. You let me believe that lie for five years.” He growled.

Claudia was already shaking uncontrollably. “I can explain!”

“No.” His voice cut through hers like a blade. “There is nothing left for you to explain.”

He turned toward me. His expression softened instantly. The contrast was almost startling.

Regret, pain, and determination. All of it filled his eyes.

“Aria. I wronged you. I hurt you. I failed you as your mate.”

His jaw tightened. “But I swear to you...” His voice rang through the room with absolute conviction. “I will make this right.”

Damon’s words lingered in the room long after they left his lips.

His gaze never wavered from mine. There wasn’t a shred of doubt in his eyes anymore. No suspicion. No cold accusations. No instinctive decision to believe Claudia over me.

For the very first time since becoming his mate, his trust belonged entirely to me.

Lydia let out a long, weary sigh. Isn’t this what we’ve always wanted?

I lowered my eyes. My thoughts spiraled. How many nights had I cried myself to sleep, wishing Damon would simply listen? How many times had I begged him to believe me?

“I didn’t do it. I’ve never hurt Claudia. Please trust me.” I would say all this, and every single time... he had looked at me with disappointment. Or suspicion. Or anger.

Every single time... he had chosen Claudia.

Lydia whimpered. He broke us.

Yes. The scars weren’t visible. But they were carved into my soul.

Now... now he had changed. It should have made me happy. Instead... I felt nothing but exhaustion.

Some wounds healed. Others simply became part of who you were.

His voice broke through my thoughts. “Justin.”

His assistant stepped forward immediately. “Alpha.”

His expression hardened. “Get me my phone. There is a recording on it that reveals Claudia for who she really is. I need it for her trial.”

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“Alpha, your phone was destroyed in the fire.”

Damon cursed under his breath. “Damn it.” He frowned. “I clearly listened to that recording. I heard everything. Now it is gone!”

Classy

Claudia, still kneeling beneath the lingering Alpha pressure, slowly lifted her head. Hope flickered across

her face.

No evidence. She knew exactly what that meant. A tiny smile almost appeared at the corner of her lips.

Then the ward door opened again. Lady Duran hurried inside. "Damon!"

The moment she saw Damon, relief flooded her face.

"My son!" She rushed toward him before noticing Claudia kneeling on the floor.

"Claudia!" She gasped. "What happened?"

Her eyes immediately turned toward Damon. "Why is she on the ground?"

Damon answered without emotion. "I put her there."

Lady Duran blinked. "What?"

"She lied. She deceived me. She framed Aria."

Her brows furrowed. She looked at Claudia. Then at me. Finally, she sighed.

"Damon. Even if Claudia made mistakes..."

"Mistakes?" His voice turned icy.

Lady Duran continued anyway. "You need to forgive her. We all make mistakes. Besides..."

She walked over and helped Claudia sit upright. "This girl once saved your life."

She gently held Claudia's hand. "If not for her, you wouldn't even be alive today." She glanced at me. "That alone makes her more worthy of standing beside you than Aria

Lydia snarled. There she goes again.

I wasn't surprised. Not even a little. Lady Duran had never hidden her dislike for me. Nothing I did had ever been enough.

Damon's expression darkened. "Mother." His voice carried a warning. "Don't."

She frowned. "What?"

“You are wrong. The person who saved me five years ago was never Claudia.”

Lady Duran frowned. “What are you talking about?”

“It was Aria.”

Silence filled the room.

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Lady Duran stared at him as though she’d misheard. “What?”

“Aria rescued me during the avalanche. I heard a recording of Claudia admitting it. Claudia stole Aria’s place. She’s been lying to all of us for five years.”

Lady Duran laughed once. A disbelieving laugh. “Impossible.”

“It’s the truth.”

“No.” She shook her head firmly. “Where is the recording? I need to see the proof myself.”

Damon froze.

Lady Duran crossed her arms. “If you’re so certain, prove it. Show me the recording.”

Clair

A flicker of frustration crossed Damon’s face. “My phone...” His voice trailed off. “It was destroyed along with everything inside it during the explosion. I don’t have it anymore.”

Lady Duran looked unconvinced. “So there’s no proof?”

“There is.” Damon immediately looked toward me. “The original recording.” His voice softened. “Aria has it. She sent that recording to me.”

Every eye in the room turned toward me.

Claudia’s face became completely bloodless.

Damon took a slow step toward me. “Aria.” There was trust in his eyes. “You sent that recording to me. If you play it, the truth will be revealed to everyone.”

Lady Duran folded her arms. “Yes. If such a recording exists... let’s hear it.”

Even Claudia stopped breathing. The entire room waited. One recording. One press of a button. That was all it would take.

My hand slowly slipped into my pocket. My fingertips brushed against my phone. The recording was still-

there.

Lydia looked at me quietly. Are we going to reveal it?

I closed my eyes for the briefest moment. I thought about the tiny heartbeat growing inside me.

Then... I slowly withdrew my hand.

Everyone watched me expectantly. Damon's eyes were filled with hope. Claudia's were filled with terror. Lady Duran waited with folded arms.

I looked at each of them in turn. When I finally spoke, my voice was calm and steady without the slightest ripple of emotion.

"I never saved Damon."

The room fell into stunned silence. Damon's face drained of all color as he stared at me in disbelief.

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Chapter 146

Claim

Aria's POV

Damon stepped toward me, desperation burning in his eyes. "No, Aria." His voice was rough. "Don't say

that."

I held his gaze. "It's the truth."

"No." His breathing turned ragged. "I remember. I saw the avalanche. I saw you. I heard your voice. You saved me."

My hands clenched. I couldn't back down. If Damon proved I had saved him, if everyone learned the Moon Goddess had bound us together from the beginning, the Hawthorne family would never let me leave.

Not while I carried Damon's child. Not while they believed I was destined to stand beside their Alpha.

I'd fought too hard for my freedom. I wouldn't lose it now. Not even for the truth.

Damon reached for me. "Aria." His voice cracked. "Look at me."

"I am."

"Then stop lying."

A bitter smile tugged at my lips. "Lying? I am not lying. I never saved you."

He frowned and shook his head, "No. My wolf remembers. So does my heart. Besides the recording and my dream, you always told me you were the one who saved me."

I swallowed hard. Then I drove the knife in.

"I lied to you." The room froze.

Damon stared at me. "What...?"

"I always claimed I saved you because I wanted your attention I wanted you to love me. Unfortunately, I never got it." I sighed. "Right now, I no longer want it, so there is no point in lying about saving you."

Damon's eyes reddened. "Tell me what you just said is not true, Aria."

"It is. I was selfish and ambitious, so I lied. I never saved you."

His hands shook. "Stop." His voice broke. "Please... Don't lie to me."

I forced myself onward. "Claudia says she saved you... maybe she did. You believed her for five years. Why stop now?"

"Enough!" His Alpha roar exploded through the room. Windows rattled. Machines shook. The air itself trembled.

"I know what I saw! You saved me! I remember your scent! You can't erase that!"

My heart twisted. Because he was right.

Lydia whimpered. We're hurting him.

Yes, we are. I shut my heart. He has hurt us for years. He is only getting what he deserves.

Lady Duran stepped between us. "Enough." She looked at Damon. "You're confused."

Glaum

Then her cold eyes landed on me, "I warned everyone. This woman is calculating. She admitted she lied. A vile woman like her is not fit to remain your Luna."

Lydia growled. She never wanted us.

Lady Duran continued. "Claudia made mistakes. But at least she loved you."

Walter stepped forward. The room instantly quieted. "The agreement I made with Aria has been fulfilled." His voice carried absolute authority. "The divorce contract is legally binding."

His eyes met mine. "Aria Grayson. You are no longer a Hawthorne."

Relief loosened my chest.

Walter turned to Damon. "You no longer have any legal or family authority over her."

Silence fell.

"As I promised her... she is free."

Damon's jaw tightened. "You can't do that to me, Grandfather."

Walter frowned. "This isn't your decision."

"It is." His Alpha aura burst outward again. "I don't accept this divorce."

Walter didn't flinch. "You accepted it the moment I sealed it with the Hawthorne crest."

"I never agreed to it! I'll reject it."

"You can't."

The two Alphas locked eyes. Neither yielded.

Then Damon looked at me. His expression darkened.

“Noah,”

I blinked. “What?”

“Is this because of Noah Hargreaves?”

I stayed silent.

His eyes hardened. “Are you in love with him?”

Lydia snorted. Here he goes again.

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“Yes,” I lied.

Claim

He swallowed hard. “You think Noah helped you out of kindness? He didn’t. He wanted the eastern port. The shipping routes. He used you to weaken me.”

The room went still. Justin towered his head. Even Walter stayed silent. Apparently, everyone already knew.

Lydia nudged me. Tell him.

I nodded. “I know.”

Damion froze. “What?”

“I’ve known for a long time.”

Confusion replaced his anger. “You knew? Yet you still stayed with him?”

“That is correct.”

“Why?”

“Because his motives didn’t erase his actions. When everyone abandoned me... he gave me shelter. When no one believed me... he listened.”

I took a step closer to him. “I’ve always considered Noah my friend.”

Damon’s fists tightened. “Friend?”

“Yes. He is my friend, and he has his reasons for doing whatever he is doing.”

Damon's eyes narrowed. "What reasons?"

I met his stare. "I do not know, and I do not care. All I know is I knew exactly what Noah was doing, and I chose to play along to get my revenge and free myself from you."

Damon's POV

I couldn't believe all that I had heard. Aria stood before me and confessed that she was in love with Noah and everything she'd done... had all been to escape me.

Rhein paced wildly beneath my skin. She is not in love with him. She is lying.

I clenched my fists. How do you know?

Because she's still our mate. The bond is wounded, but it isn't broken.

Hope flared inside me. I looked at her. "You said Noah is only your friend."

She stayed silent.

I stepped closer. "Aria, you don't love him. I can feel it."

"Whether I love him or not is none of your business, Damon."

"It is. Aria You and I can make this work. We still have a chance."

She sighed. "Damon. We're divorced. It's over between us."

Claims

"I don't care." The words burst out. "I don't care about the contract! I don't care what Grandfather says!"

Rhein roared. Keep her!

"I'll destroy every agreement! I'll fight the entire Hawthorne family! If being Alpha is the problem..." His breath caught. "I'll give it up."

The room froze.

"I'll resign. I'll give Silvermoon away. I don't want the title. I don't want the territory. I don't want the power. I only want you, Aria."

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Damon's POV

Aria looked at me with pity. That hurt more than hatred.

"Damon. You still don't understand."

"What don't I understand?"

"You keep talking about what you want. You've never asked what I want."

I froze. The words sliced straight through me.

"I don't want this marriage. I don't want to come back to you."

Every sentence shattered something inside me.

Rhein whimpered. She's gone...

"No." I shook my head. "You don't mean it."

"I do, Damon."

Something inside me broke at her words. She turned toward the door. Panic took over.

"No!" I grabbed her wrist. She gasped.

"You're not leaving. I won't let you go." My grip tightened. "If I have to lock you inside the Hawthorne villa..."

I will."

Lady Duran gasped. "Damon!"

"I'll never let you leave again. I don't care if you hate me. I'll chain you to me if I have to."

Rhein growled. Anything. Anything but losing her.

Walter's cane slammed against the floor. "Enough." His Alpha aura crashed over the room. "Damon. Release her."

"No, Grandfather, I won't."

"Release her now!" he growled.

“I said no!”

Walter turned to the doctors. “Sedate him.”

I looked up sharply. “What?”

The doctor hesitated. “Alpha...”

“That’s an order,” my grandfather commanded.

“If you dare come close, I will snap your bones,” I said to the doctor, whose frightened gaze turned to my

<Chapter 144- grandfather.

My father immediately sprang into action. He rushed me and held my arms. I struggled to break free. He commanded Justin and the doctors to help subdue me. They did.

Pain ripped through my ribs. The room spun. My legs gave out.

Rhein snarled. Move! Move!

One of the doctors acted. “I’m sorry, Alpha.” The needle pierced my arm.

“No...” The sedative spread instantly. My body turned heavy. I forced a step toward Aria, but my knees buckled.

“Let me go!” I pleaded with my grandfather as I watched Aria walk toward the door.

“Aria... please don’t leave!” I screamed..

She reached the doorway. Then stopped. Hope exploded inside me.

She looked back. There was no hatred in her eyes, only sadness and goodbye.

“Take care of yourself.” She turned away.

“No! Aria!”

The sedative dragged me under. Everything slowed.

Rhein released a broken howl. Mate... Please don’t leave..

Aria never looked back. The door clicked shut.

I stared at the closed door. With Aria's departure, something priceless had slipped away. Something my soul recognized before my mind ever could.

The emptiness was unbearable. Darkness swallowed me.

The last thing I saw... was the closed hospital door. And the certainty that my entire world had just walked

away.

Aria's POV

It had been five years.

Sometimes it felt like five lifetimes.

The day I walked away from Damon Hawthorne, I thought my world had ended. Instead, another one began.

Under Noah's protection, I gave birth to our daughter abroad, far from the Silvermoon Pack's reach.

For five years, no danger reached us.

Life hadn't been kind, but it had given me one precious gift. My daughter, my little miracle.

While raising Etona over the past five years, I buried myself in my studies. Endless nights became endless

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months until I finally earned my doctorate in architecture.

Then came the competitions. The designs. The impossible deadlines.

Clairy

Using the name Eira, I entered the world's biggest architectural design competition. I won the International Gold Award.

One project became dozens. One client became hundreds. The tiny design studio I started from nothing slowly grew into one of the fastest-rising firms in the industry.

Today... it officially went public. Everything I had worked for... everything I had sacrificed... had finally paid off.

Yet every achievement left one emptiness untouched. Joshua and Dad, the family that Claudia had destroyed.

My smile slowly faded as I looked toward the garden outside. My father sat beneath a flowering tree, quietly feeding birds scattered across the grass.

“Dad.” I walked over with a gentle smile.

He slowly turned. His cloudy eyes rested on me. For a moment... hope flickered inside me. Maybe today... maybe he remembered.

Then he smiled warmly. “Lily, you’ve grown so much.”

Lily. My mother’s name. He thought I was her again.

I crouched beside him anyway. “Are the birds keeping you company?”

He nodded happily. “Joshua should be home from school soon.”

The words pierced straight through me. Joshua... my brother had been dead for years. Dad had accidentally learned the truth after his release on medical parole.

The shock had shattered what remained of his mind. Joshua’s death destroyed his memories. Now Alzheimer’s stole away whatever little remained.

Some days he thought Joshua was still a child. Some days he believed I was my mother. Most days... he remembered no one.

This was all thanks to Claudia.

It isn’t fair, Lydia whispered.

No... it isn’t. I gently straightened Dad’s blanket. “I’ll be back soon, okay?”

He smiled absentmindedly and nodded.

Tears burned behind my eyes. My phone rang before I could lose control.

“Ms. Aria!” My assistant’s excited voice practically exploded through the speaker.

“We did it! The company officially went public this morning! Our opening price exceeded every forecast! The investors are celebrating! We’re trending everywhere!”

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Leouldn’t stop myself from smiling. “Congratulations.”

“No, congratulations to you! You built all of this from scratch. We couldn’t have done it without you.”

Five years. Five years of blood, sweat, and sleepless nights had led us here.

I looked toward my father. Then toward the house where childish laughter echoed through the halls. Finally, I said, “I need you to arrange my flight to the Silvermoon Pack. I leave tomorrow.”

There was a brief silence. “You’re really going back?” my assistant asked.

“Yes. I have unfinished business there.”

It was finally time to exact my revenge on Claudia. I slowly closed my eyes. I was done running.

Lydia’s silver eyes flashed inside my mind. It’s our turn to hunt.

Yes. But revenge isn’t enough. She’ll lose everything first.

“I’ll arrange your flight immediately,” my assistant said. “What about Mr. Ronan and Miss Elona?”

i

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 148

Claim

Aria’s POV

Claim

I narrowed my eyes. “They’re staying here. It won’t be safe for them over there. They’ll remain here, under Noah’s protection.”

“Understood.”

After confirming the remaining details, I ended the call.

No sooner had I lowered my phone than tiny footsteps came racing toward me.

“Mummy!” A little girl launched herself into my arms with enough force to make me stagger backward.

I laughed and caught her easily. “Slow down, little princess.”

She giggled. She was five years old. She had dark hair and silver eyes that sparkled whenever she smiled. I stared at those beautiful eyes.

For just a heartbeat... I wasn't looking at Elona anymore. I was looking at Damon. The shape of her eyes. The stubborn little pout. Even the way she tilted her head... she looked so much like him.

“I made dessert!” Elona proudly scooped up a spoonful and held it toward me. “Ah.”

I blinked. “Hm?”

“You have to eat it.”

I obediently opened my mouth. She fed me with a grin so bright it chased away every dark thought.

“There. I made Mummy happy.”

“You always do.” I kissed her forehead. For a brief moment... everything felt peaceful.

Then another thought quietly crept into my mind. How was Damon now? Was he healthy? Had he fully recovered from his injuries?

I didn't know. I had deliberately avoided every article... every interview... every rumor connected to the Hawthorne family.

At first... I waited. Every knock at the door made my heart race. Every unfamiliar scent made Lydia lift her head hopefully. I truly believed Damon would come. One month. Three months. A year. Then five. He never

came.

Does it still hurt? Lydia asked quietly.

I didn't answer immediately. “I don't know.” Sometimes... I felt relief. Sometimes... disappointment. Sometimes... nothing at all.

His face suddenly flashed across my memory. I remembered how broken and desperate he had looked that day when he begged me not to leave.

I clenched my fists and forced the memory away.

Claim

“It was guilt. Nothing else. He only pitied me after learning the truth. A man like Damon Hawthorne could never truly love someone like me.”

Lydia remained silent for several long seconds. Then she sighed. Keep telling yourself that.

I ignored her. Instead, I thought about Claudia. She had probably stayed beside Damon these past five

years.

By now... they were probably living the perfect life together. Perhaps they had already completed their mating ceremony.

Perhaps they even had pups. The thought stung far more than I wanted to admit. I quickly buried it. It no longer mattered.

The next day, I was already dressed and done packing when Elona rushed into my room.

“Mummy?” Elona’s little voice reached me. She stared at my suitcase. “Are you done packing?”

“Yes, I am.” I smiled at her.

I had already told her last night that I would go on a journey for a short while and return as soon as I could,

“I want to come too.”

I smiled helplessly. “No.”

Her tiny face immediately puffed into a pout. “Why?”

“Because Mummy has work to do.”

f

“I can help you with work. While I am gone, I need you to stay here with Grandpa.”

“I don’t want to.” She wrapped both little arms around my waist. “I’ll miss you.”

I hugged her tightly. “I’ll miss you too. But I promise... I’ll come home after a short while.”

She reluctantly nodded. "Alright, please don't stay away for long."

"I won't, I promise."

A familiar scent drifted toward us. Lydia lifted her head immediately. It was Noah. I stepped out into the living room with Elona and my suitcase.

A second later, the front door opened. Noah walked inside wearing his usual gentle smile.

"Are you ready?"

I nodded. "Almost."

Elona ran straight into his arms. "Uncle Noah!"

Hie effortlessly picked her up. "My little princess."

Watching them together always filled me with gratitude. Noah had protected us for five years without

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asking for anything in return.

"I still owe you more than I can repay."

He looked at me. "You don't owe me anything. You and Elona are family." His words were simple. But I caught the sadness hidden behind his smile.

Lydia noticed it too. He still loves you.

Don't say that.

You know it's true, Lydia insisted.

Claim

I stayed silent. An hour later... we arrived at the airport. The moment Noah's car stopped... chaos erupted.

"There she is!"

"Miss Eira! Over here!"

Camera flashes exploded from every direction. A lot of people crowded behind security barriers, their excited scents filling the air.

“Miss Eira! Are you and Mr. Hargreaves in a relationship?”

“When are you getting married?”

“Mr. Hargreaves! Has the Whitemoon Pack already chosen its future Luna?”

Lydia growled. There are too many people here.

Security struggled to hold them back.

Noah stepped beside me without hesitation. “Stay close.”

Before I could respond, he slipped one arm around my shoulders, shielding me from the crowd as we

walked.

His Alpha aura rolled outward in controlled waves.

The reporters shouted even louder. “Mr. Hargreaves! So you’re confirming the rumors?”.

Noah merely smiled. “No comment.”

He kept me tucked safely against his side until we finally crossed into the boarding lounge. The doors slid shut behind us, cutting off the deafening noise outside. Silence returned.

I released a slow breath. I was finally going back home after five years... I wasn’t returning as the broken Luna who had fled with nothing.

I was returning as Aria Grayson, and Claudia Stone was about to learn exactly what that meant.

Vate

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 149

Damon’s POV

It had been five years. Five years since Aria left.

Clasm

I watched the footage from Eira Architecture's IPO ceremony. Or rather... Aria's company. I replayed it over and over again.

Aria stood confidently on the stage, dressed in a crisp white suit that carried all the grace and authority of

a Luna.

The flashing cameras didn't faze her. The reporters' endless questions didn't shake her. She had changed. The timid girl who used to lower her head whenever someone raised their voice was gone.

The woman on the screen held herself like a bold, powerful leader.

My fingers unconsciously brushed across the screen:

"Aria..." My voice was so low I barely heard it myself.

Mate... Rhein's voice echoed faintly inside my head.

It was weak, as if it had traveled across an endless abyss to reach me. He had almost become dormant ever since Aria left.

The footage continued. A reporter suddenly stepped forward.

"Miss Eira, there have been persistent rumors that you and Mr. Noah Hargreaves are a couple. Would you like to comment?"

Every muscle in my body locked. The smile disappeared from my face. The room instantly grew colder.

I turned my gaze to Justin, who hurried inside without lifting his head.

"Alpha."

I kept staring at the frozen image as I spoke to Justin, who now stood beside me.

"Justin."

"Yes, Alpha."

"Blacklist every media company affiliated with that reporter. His career ends today."

Justin didn't even hesitate. "Understood, Alpha."

He quietly left. The office returned to silence.

Bring her back. Rhein sounded exhausted. Bring our mate home.

“I will. I don’t care how long it takes. I don’t care who stands in my way. I’ll bring her back.”

Everything changed five years ago after that car accident. Death had wrapped itself around me. I should

have died. Instead... she came.

Clare

She reopened the mate bond. Not to stay, not to forgive me. Only... to wake me. So she could divorce me while looking into my eyes.

I still remembered how cold her voice was when she told me she was leaving. I remembered reaching for her, begging her.

Yet she turned around and left. That image never left me. Never.

After that... everything became blurry. My wolf collapsed into an endless sleep. The healers called it trauma-induced hibernation.

The rejection from our mate had shattered him.

Months passed before my body stabilized. When I finally opened my eyes... pieces of my memories returned. Some came back clearly. Others... were gone forever.

I remembered hatred, blood, betrayal, and pain. But whenever I tried to remember something happy... something involving Aria... my skull felt like it would split open.

Fragments flashed before my eyes. Her laughter, her smile. Then... pain. Unbearable pain. As though my own mind refused to let me remember.

The psychiatrists called it trauma. I called it torture. Because no matter how hard I searched... I could never remember why I had loved her. Only... that I still did.

Unfortunately... other people refused to understand.

Over the years, my mother tried all she could to get me to marry Claudia. The first time it happened, she came to my office.

“Damon.” She entered without waiting for permission. “You aren’t getting any younger.”

I kept signing documents without responding.

“The neighboring Alpha families already have heirs. The Silvermoon Pack needs a Luna. It needs pups.”

My pen stopped.

She smiled hopefully. “Claudia has waited for you faithfully for a long time.”

I slowly raised my head. The hope disappeared from her face.

“You’ve mistaken my silence for permission.”

Her breathing hitched. “I...”

“If you mention Claudia again...” I leaned back. “I’ll remove every privilege you still possess.”

Her face turned pale. “And if you interfere in my life again...” I smiled. It wasn’t a pleasant smile. “I’ll take drastic action.”

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She stumbled backward. “Damon...”

“Leave, Mother.”

Chim

She left without another word. Even after that, she never stopped. She was not the only one who had been trying to get me to marry Claudia. Lilith, my younger sister, had too.

They engineered opportunities to leave Claudia and me alone in the same space, hoping that something would happen.

So I made good on my threat. I made my mother lose nearly every ounce of authority she once held. I did the same to Lilith. Neither dared challenge me again.

Word had spread through the pack. The pack whispered that their Alpha had changed. They were right. The Damon Hawthorne they all once knew... had died.

Night fell. I returned to my room. The lights were on. I frowned. The scent reached me first. Claudia.

I opened the bedroom door. She stood beside my bed wearing a thin silk negligee that left almost nothing to the imagination.

She smiled seductively. “Damon... I thought you might be lonely.”

Disgust surged through me.

She walked closer. “You’ve worked so hard. I can help you relax.” She reached for my chest.

Before her fingers touched me... I moved. My hand wrapped around her throat. Her feet left the floor. Her eyes widened.

“D-Damon...”

I slammed her against the wall. The room shook.

“How dare you touch me.”

She clawed desperately at my wrist. “I...”

“I told you...” My voice was ice. “Never. Touch. Me.”

My Alpha aura crushed the room. Furniture splintered. The windows cracked.

She gasped desperately. “But... I, iove...”

“You?” I laughed. It held no warmth.

“I don’t remember many things. My memories are broken. I forget faces. Conversations. Entire years.” I tightened my grip. “But there’s one thing I’ve never forgotten.”

“I hate you.”

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

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Damon’s POV

Pure terror filled her eyes. She tried one last desperate gamble. “Aria...”

Claim

My hand froze. She noticed. A twisted smile spread across her face despite the pain. “Aria doesn’t love you anymore.”

My head throbbed, sharp and violent.

“She left you.” The pain intensified. Fragments flashed. Aria. Walking away.

“She’ll never forgive you.” Blood trickled from my temple. “She’ll never come back.”

Mate... Rhein cried weakly.

A roar ripped from my throat. I nearly crushed Claudia’s neck. Almost. Almost... instead... I released her.

She collapsed onto the floor, coughing violently. She looked up in confusion.

I stared down at her coldly. She had Aria to thank for still being alive. My reason for still keeping her alive was simple.

She was the bait to lure Aria back to me. Once Aria appeared again, she would no longer have any value.

“Get out.”

Claudia staggered to her feet and fled. The moment she disappeared... Justin entered.

“Alpha.”

“What?”

“Ms. Aria has officially entered Whitemoon Pack territory.”

Every muscle in my body tightened.

Justin continued carefully. “Our surveillance team has begun tracking her movements. You’ll receive scheduled reports every hour.”

My lips slowly curved upward.

Finally.

“There’s more.” He spoke eagerly. “Ms. Aria will attend a business banquet tonight.”

Justin placed an invitation on my bed. “You have received an invitation to the same business banquet.”

There was silence.

He hesitated, “Will you attend?”

A slow smile spread across my face. It felt almost unfamiliar. Almost manic.

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“Yes.”

Justin blinked. “Prepare the car.”

“Understood.”

“But...” I picked up the invitation. “No one is to know I’m coming.”

Justin lowered his head immediately. “Yes, Alpha.”

Clam

The room fell silent after he left. For five years, I’d searched for Aria in every crowd and every dream. My sleepless nights were because of her. Tonight... I wouldn’t have to imagine her anymore.

Mate... Rhein whispered, his weak voice carrying a hope I hadn’t heard in years.

I slowly closed my hand around the invitation. “Run if you want, Aria. You’ve already escaped me once. You won’t escape me again.”

Aria’s POV

The hotel suite felt strangely quiet. I had only been away from home for a single day, yet I already missed the little footsteps constantly chasing after me.

As if summoned by my thoughts, my phone lit up. Elona was calling. A smile immediately tugged at my lips. I answered.

The screen filled with my daughter’s face. “Mummy!” Her eyes sparkled the moment she saw me. “I miss you.”

My heart softened instantly. “I miss you too, sweetheart.”

She pouted dramatically. “You’ve been gone forever

I laughed. “It’s only been a day.”

“It feels like several years.”

Lydia chuckled inside my mind. She inherited someone’s talent for exaggeration.

Before I could argue with my wolf, Elona leaned closer to the camera. “Mummy.”

“Hmm?”

“When are you coming home?”

“As soon as my work is finished. The moment I’m done, I’ll come straight home. And...” I lowered my voice conspiratorially. “I’ll bring you a birthday present.”

Her mouth fell open. “Really?”

“Of course, my princess.”

“Thank you, Mummy. I love you.”

“I love you more.” I smiled.

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“No. I love you most.”

Claim

Before we could continue arguing, Noah’s housekeeper walked into view. “Miss Elona, it’s time for dinner.”

Elona sighed heavily. “I have to go.”

“Be good for Grandpa.”

“I will. Bye, Mummy!”

The call ended. The room fell silent again. For several seconds... I simply stared at my reflection in the dark screen.

An hour later... I stood before the full-length mirror. The woman staring back at me barely resembled the Aria who had left this city five years ago.

A midnight-blue evening gown hugged my figure elegantly. The diamond earrings caught the light with every movement. My hair fell over one shoulder in soft waves. I looked professional, elegant, and confident.

Lydia circled proudly. Now that’s our Luna.

I smiled faintly. “I’m not anyone’s Luna anymore.”

She didn't answer.

A knock sounded. I opened the door. Noah stood outside in a perfectly tailored black suit. His blue eyes lingered on me for a moment before a smile appeared.

"You look beautiful."

"So do you."

He laughed. "I'll take that as a compliment."

I smiled. Together, we headed toward the venue for the business banquet.

We soon arrived. The moment I stepped out of the car, a cold gust of wind brushed against my body. Just then, a familiar warmth settled across my shoulders. I looked down. Noah had draped his suit jacket over

"You'll catch a chill."

"I can handle a little cold, Noah."

"I know." His smile remained gentle. "I still don't like it."

Before I could protest, he naturally placed an arm around my shoulders as we walked toward the grand

entrance.

Camera flashes immediately exploded around us.

"There are so many reporters here..." I said in a low tone.

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Noah just smiled. "It is normal with these kinds of events."

Whispers followed wherever we walked.

"Who is she?"

"Isn't that Noah Hargreaves?"

"They look so close. Is she the future Luna of the Whitemoon-Pack?"

"What a beautiful couple."

I leaned slightly closer to Noah and whispered teasingly, “If you keep standing this close to me... no woman will dare approach you tonight.”

He looked at me without smiling.

“I don’t want any other woman to approach me.”

I blinked.

“I only want you.”