

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 201

Aria's POV

My heart lurched into my throat. The man standing beneath the porch light slowly stepped forward. It was really Damon.

Lydia surged to her feet so abruptly that our entire mindscape trembled. Rhein!

Her joyful cry echoed through me before she suddenly stopped....Wait.

I stared at him. "Damon... what are you doing here?"

He let out a slow breath. "Justin told me you took Elona and left the country." His jaw tightened. "I panicked. I thought you had left for good."

The words caught me off guard. "You flew here because of that?"

"Yes, I came here as soon as I heard you left."

Damon's expression suddenly changed. His nostrils flared. His eyes darkened. He took one slow step toward me. "You've been with another male."

The accusation hit me like cold water. "What?"

"The scent." His wolf was close to the surface now. "I can smell him."

Lydia immediately became wary. His Alpha instincts are taking over.

Damon's eyes remained fixed on me. "It isn't Noah." He inhaled again. "It is someone else." His gaze hardened. "I can smell something else." He inhaled slowly. "Wine."

I stiffened. "I didn't drink it."

"I know." His voice was dangerously calm. "But I can smell it."

Then his expression shifted again. Something flashed across his face. Confusion, followed immediately by rage.

His fists clenched. His voice became almost a growl. "I can also smell heat."

My cheeks burned. My body had reacted to Ryder's intimate kiss. Damon could smell the lingering heat.

Lydia groaned. This is bad. Very bad.

Damon's Alpha aura exploded outward. The flowerpots lining the entrance rattled. The

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security lights flickered.

"You let him touch you."

It wasn't a question. I folded my arms across my chest.

"You don't get to interrogate me."

His eyes flashed. "I'm your mate."

"No." I cut him off sharply. "You don't get to say that either."

Silence crashed between us. I pointed toward the gate. "You should leave."

"I'm not leaving."

"Damon. I said leave."

Before either of us could speak again, a tiny voice floated from inside the house.

"Mommy?"

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We both turned. Elona stood barefoot in her little pajamas, rubbing one sleepy eye.

"Who's making noise?"

The moment Damon saw her, everything changed. His Alpha aura vanished almost instantly. The rage melted away. His entire face softened. "My little wolf..."

Elona blinked. "Mister?"

Just then, another voice interrupted. "I thought I heard someone." Noah stepped out onto the porch. The instant his eyes landed on Damon, the air immediately became heavy again.

Two Alpha auras silently collided. Neither released their full pressure. Neither needed to. The tension alone made the night feel colder.

Lydia sighed dramatically. Here we go again.

Noah's gaze shifted briefly to Elona and me before returning to Damon's face. "You need to leave, Damon."

Damon didn't move. "No, I don't."

Noah's eyes narrowed. "You don't belong here."

"I didn't come to argue. I came because there is something I need to discuss with Aria

My heartbeat skipped. He looked directly at me.

Woah noticed my expression "What could that be?"

Damon's gaze never left mine. "Something important. It concerns the Grayson land, Ronan,

and JossuE"

I face Joshua Farther?

4 chill spread trough my body

Lydia whispered He's not wrg

I searched Damoms face carefully Years together had taught me when he lied, when he hid things, when he was angry and when he was afraid. This wasn't any of those.

He was completely senous

I stepped aside Come in'

He didn't argue further Instead, he silently opened the door wider.

The atmosphere inside the house was painfully awkward. Elona, blissfully unaware of the silent battle between the three adults, disappeared into the kitchen.

1 made dessert" she announced proudly. She returned carrying three small plates. "I learned today! She placed one in front of Damon first. "This one's yours."

Damon smiled warmly, "You made this?"

I had help”

He picked up the spoon. “It’s beautiful.” He took a bite. His eyes widened slightly. “This is delicious

Elona beamed “Really?

“The best dessert I’ve had in a long time.”

She giggled happily

Woah clearly picked up his tea. “I’m glad you like it.”

Larson looked over Noah’s expression remained perfectly neutral.

“The place you’re making He took a slow sip. “Is the one I made.”

There was complete silence. Damon’s chewing slowed almost imperceptibly. His jaw stiffened.

Lydia burst into laughter inside my head. Oh, that’s evil.

Even I had to bite the inside of my cheek to stop myself from smiling.

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Damon swallowed with visible effort. “In that case, I guess it isn’t as good as I thought it was.”

Their eyes met again. The room temperature seemed to drop several degrees.

Lydia muttered, Five... four... three...

I stood up immediately. “Damon.” Both men looked at me. “Come with me to the study.”

Noah frowned. “Aria?”

“I need to hear what he knows.” I turned toward the hallway.

Without waiting for either man to argue, I walked away. After a brief pause, Damon followed. The study door closed behind us, shutting out the growing tension in the living room.

I turned to face him. “Now.” My voice was calm. “Tell me everything you know about the Grayson land.”

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Aria’s POV

Damon let out a slow breath before speaking again. “The land has become dangerous.”

My brows knitted together. “What do you mean?”

He looked directly into my eyes. “People have died there.”

My heartbeat skipped. “What?”

“Construction workers.” His expression hardened. “But not all of them. The humans walked away unharmed.”

A chill crawled down my spine.

“The dead,” Damon continued quietly, “were all werewolves.”

The room suddenly felt much colder. “Werewolves?”

He nodded once. “Every one of them was a victim.”

Lydia stirred uneasily. That isn’t normal.

No... it isn’t.

I swallowed. “How many died?”

“Seven confirmed.”

My stomach tightened. “Were they from your pack?”

“No.”

“Then whose pack?”

He shook his head. "No one knows. Their identities remain unknown. They appear to be rogue wolves."

Rogue wolves. That alone was disturbing enough.

Damon continued. "The Werewolf Council has already opened an investigation."

That made my heart sink even further. The Council rarely interfered unless something threatened every pack.

"This wasn't ruled an accident?"

He shook his head. "No."

"They think someone murdered them?"

"They don't know." His voice grew lower. "They just don't believe this was an ordinary construction accident."

A heavy silence settled between us.

Damon leaned back slightly. "I received notice before the investigation became public."

I looked at him. "Why?"

"I'm Alpha of Silvermoon."

Right. Some matters reached Alphas before anyone else.

"I was reviewing the report when you left the country." His eyes darkened with frustration. "I was so focused on this investigation that I failed to realize you'd disappeared until it was too late."

He held my gaze. "You'll be contacted soon."

I blinked. "Me?"

"The land belongs to the Grayson family." My pulse quickened. "The Council will question everyone connected to it."

slowly nodded. "I understand."

His gaze became sharp. "But before they do..." He leaned forward. "I need to know whether that land is hiding something."

Something. The word echoed through my mind. Instantly, Father's broken voice resurfaced. The altar... the sacrifice... don't go there...

My fingers curled tightly.

Should we tell him? Lydia asked quietly.

I don't know. I really don't

Lydia fell silent

What if he's involved in all of this?

Looked!

holding me carefully.

"You know something." It wasn't a question.

I immediately shook my head. "I don't."

His eyes narrowed. Then he sighed. "I suppose you still don't trust me."

I laughed bitterly. "Should I?"

His expression became unreadable. "No, you shouldn't."

That answer caught me off guard. "No?" I repeated.

"No." He stood and walked toward the large window overlooking the city. "You have every

reason not to."

The confession sounded almost exhausted.

"I made choices that hurt you in the past. I have also been keeping a secret from you."

I crossed my arms. "What secret?"

He turned. "It is about Claudia. While investigating her, I found out that someone has been backing her. She wasn't acting alone."

Lydia sighed softly. We already found that out.

Damon continued. "I discovered it months ago. I couldn't tell you because I wanted to protect you, I didn't want you digging to find out who was behind Claudia."

I remained silent.

His voice cracked ever so slightly. "I kept Claudia close because I needed her to believe I was still under her control."

I stared at him. "So everything..."

"Was an investigation."

I searched his face for even the slightest sign of deception. Nothing. Still, that didn't erase the past.

Damon took another slow breath. "I know words won't convince you."

'They won't

"So..." He raised his right hand. Before I could ask what he was doing, his claws slid from his fingertips. Blood welled from his palm as he sliced it open without hesitation.

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My eyes widened. "Damon!"

He ignored me. His Alpha aura slowly spread across the room, powerful and commanding. Even Lydia instinctively lowered her head inside me.

What is he doing? she whispered.

My heartbeat thundered. "Damon, what are you doing?"

Damon looked straight into my eyes. "I am about to take an oath."

He pressed his bleeding palm over his chest. The air vibrated. His wolf answered. I couldn't see Rhein, but I felt him fiercely.

His presence intertwined with Damon's. The room suddenly felt heavier. The hairs on my arms stood on end.

"I, Damon Hawthorne, Alpha of the Silvermoon Pack... His voice echoed unnaturally, as though another voice spoke with his. "Swear before the Moon Goddess..."

A pale glow surrounded the blood dripping from his hand.

My breathing stopped. Those oaths were older than the packs themselves. Irreversible, sacred, and deadly.

Damon never looked away from me. “I swear that from this moment forward, I will keep no truth from Aria Grayson that concerns her safety, her family, our child, or the enemies surrounding her.”

The glow intensified. “If I knowingly break this oath, may the Moon Goddess reject my wolf.”

A violent pulse swept through the room.

Lydia shivered. He isn’t joking.

No. If he lies after this... Rhein could die.

The silver light wrapped around Damon’s wrist like a living chain before sinking beneath his skin. Then everything became still. The oath had been accepted.

Damon lowered his bleeding hand slowly. “There.” His gaze never left mine. “You wanted proof of my loyalty. Now you have it.”

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The room was silent. I stared at Damon while the last traces of the wolf oath faded from the

air. The Moon Goddess had accepted it. There was no taking it back now.

I finally nodded. “Fine. If we’re doing this,” I said, “then no more lies. Not from either of us.”

“I agree,” Damon said.

“Good. Now we reveal everything we have found out to each other.

“Alright.”

I pulled a chair toward him and sat down. “So... where do we start?”

He gave a weary smile. “Let’s start from five years ago.”

I nodded.

For the next several minutes, neither of us held anything back. I told him everything I had found out, including the words my father uttered recently.

He also told me everything he knew.

Lydia's ears perked inside me. He isn't hiding anything.

Damon rubbed his temples. "I spent years tracing financial records and found nothing useful." His eyes darkened. "The person behind Claudia is extraordinarily careful. They erase every trail."

He looked genuinely frustrated.

"I've followed shell companies across countries. I've investigated dozens of executives. I've questioned rogue wolves. I've bribed hackers. I've searched old Council archives, yet found nothing about this person."

A shiver ran down my spine.

Lydia growled softly. That's frightening.

It really was. Whoever was behind this had remained invisible for years.

Damon continued. "Every lead ends with Claudia. But Claudia obviously answers to someone, and that's the person we need to find."

My stomach tightened. I leaned forward. "I think that land had something to do with everything that happened to my family and our company."

Damon's gaze lifted to mine. "You are right. I figured that out too. The Grayson Group or the Graysons were never the true target. The land was."

There was silence.

"My father's company was standing in the way."

The words echoed inside my head.

Damon nodded. "It was always about the land. Your father refused to sell it. So they destroyed him."

My throat tightened. "They framed him and murdered Joshua."

Damon's jaw clenched. "I believe so."

I closed my eyes. Every painful memory crashed into me at once. Joshua smiling. Father laughing. Our family dinners. Everything, gone. Because of a piece of land.

Lydia pressed herself against me. We're going to make them pay. Every single one of them.

"There is something else you should know, Aria."

I slowly looked back at Damon. His face was unusually tense. "I've been debating whether to tell you this."

"You took an oath. You don't have that luxury anymore."

His eyes briefly dropped to the mark left behind by the wolf oath. "No..." A bitter smile crossed his lips. "I don't."

He inhaled deeply. "It is about my father."

I frowned. "What about him?"

"He was involved."

Everything inside me went still. "What?"

"My father participated in the plot against the Grayson Group."

I simply stared at him, unable to process what I'd just heard. "You..." My voice barely came out. "What did you say?"

"My father wasn't working with Claudia directly. His voice sounded hollow. "But he was part

of the conspiracy. Also, my best friend died by his hand."

The words slammed into me like a silver blade to the chest.

All those years. The accusations. The torment. Damon had believed my father killed his friend. He had punished me for it, pushing me away, breaking what should have been unbreakable. And now this. The true poison had come from his bloodline.

Fury erupted, hot and blinding.

Lydia surged forward. He let us suffer for his father's sins. She snarled in my head.

I stood so fast the chair scraped back. “You...” My voice cracked. “All this time, you tormented me, believing my father was the monster, when it was your father pulling the strings all along? Framing us? Destroying my family?”

Damon rose unsteadily. “Aria, I didn’t know. My father convinced me your father murdered my best friend. I spent years hating the wrong man.”

His shoulders slumped under the weight of his guilt. His voice shook as he spoke. “I punished you for a crime your family never committed.”

Tears burned my eyes. Every horrible memory from the time we were married replayed itself. Every cruel word he said to me. Every humiliation and punishment meted out to me. Every night I’d cried myself to sleep.

Every time he’d looked at me with pure hatred. All because of a crime his own father had committed.

Lydia whimpered softly. Aria...

I couldn’t hear anything anymore. The rage was too loud. Before I realized what I was doing, I crossed the distance between us. My hand rose.

Damon didn’t move. He didn’t dodge. He didn’t defend himself. He simply stood there, waiting.

The slap echoed through the room. Crack!

His head snapped sharply to the side. A red handprint instantly appeared across his cheek.

Comments

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Damon’s POV

The sound of the slap still rang inside my head. I deserved it.

I didn’t loosen my clenched jaw as I looked back at Aria. Tears streamed down her face, her chest rising and falling with furious breaths.

Her scent had changed completely. It was laced with grief and hatred.

Rhein whimpered inside me. Our mate is broken... We broke her.

I know.

I took one careful step toward her. She immediately stepped back. The movement was small, but it felt like someone had driven silver straight through my heart.

She fears us, Rhein said quietly.

No... she doesn't fear us anymore. She despises us. That was worse.

I looked at her trembling hands. "Aria... I am sorry."

She didn't answer.

"I know my apology doesn't change anything. There isn't a punishment severe enough for what I did."

Her laugh was cold. She looked directly into my eyes. "For once, we agree."

I closed my eyes briefly. The mate bond between us had become almost unbearable. I could feel every ounce of her pain, every wave of anger, every crack in her heart. And I knew I had caused every one of them.

When I opened my eyes again, there was only one path left. I closed the distance between us before she could move again.

She tried to pull away. I caught both of her hands. Not roughly or forcefully. Just enough to stop her from leaving.

Her wolf surged instantly. Lydia's presence flared against Rhein's.

Release her, Lydia snarled through the bond.

Rhein lowered his head. We mean no harm.

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You already harmed her.

tightened my grip just enough to keep Aria from walking away.

She glared at me. "Let go." Her eyes narrowed. "You don't get to touch me."

"I know."

“Then let go ”

“I can’t. Please listen to me, Aria.”

She looked at me with complete indifference. “What?”

I took a slow breath. “You want revenge, and you deserve it. I’ll help you.”

Her expression didn’t change. “I don’t need your help.”

“No.” I shook my head. “You need my resources. My investigators. My companies. My influence inside the Council. My contacts. My life. I’ll put every single one of them behind you.”

She stared at me.

“I’ll find the person controlling Claudia. I’ll find every piece of evidence they’ve hidden. I’ll expose everyone involved. I’ll burn every bridge necessary.” My voice grew firmer. “I’ll help you end this.”

She searched my face. “And why would you do that?”

“Because I owe you everything.” I slowly released one of her hands before lifting the other carefully. “I can’t erase the past. I can’t bring Joshua back. I can’t give you back the years I stole.”

Every word tasted like poison.

“But I can make sure the people responsible pay for their crimes and never hurt you again.”

She slowly pulled her hand free. Then she spoke in a voice completely devoid of warmth. “Listen carefully, Damon. The only thing I want now is revenge.”

The words landed like stones.

‘I want Claudia. I want the person behind her. I want everyone who touched my family. I want justice for my family’

Her wolf growled inside the room. Lydia’s fury rolled over both Rhein and me.

“I don’t care how long it takes. I don’t care how much blood is spilled. I don’t care who stands in my way.” Her eyes never left mine. “You promised to help me. Now keep your promise.”

“I will. You have my full support.

She nodded once. “Good.”

She said nothing more, just good.

I couldn’t stop myself. I reached for her. She didn’t resist. But she didn’t respond either. I wrapped my arms around her carefully. She stood completely still.

I buried my face against her hair. “I won’t fail you again. I’ll protect you.”

She remained silent. ‘I’ll stay beside you until this ends.”

Her body remained rigid in my arms. She didn’t react. She was simply enduring it, like someone waiting for a stranger to let go.

Pain unlike anything I’d ever known ripped through my chest. Not the pain of losing a battle, not even the agony of nearly dying. This was worse. Because I finally understood.

I had gotten exactly what I wanted. She wasn’t leaving. She had agreed to let me stand beside her. She had accepted my help. She had even accepted my embrace. But it was not because she still loved me, but because revenge required me.

Aria’s POV

His arms were around me, warm and strong. They felt like chains.

I didn’t push him away. Not because I wanted his comfort, but because I needed his power, influence, and connections. Everything he possessed would help me destroy Claudia and the monster hiding behind her.

Lydia was silent for a long moment. Then she asked softly, Do you still love him?

I closed my eyes. Memories crashed into me. Father’s arrest. The humiliation. The accusations. The loneliness. The endless nights I cried while Damon looked at me as though I were the daughter of a murderer.

Then came today’s truth. His father had orchestrated the conspiracy. His father had killed his own best friend. His father had framed my family, and Damon had believed it. He had made me pay for another man’s sins.

My fingers slowly curled into fists. Love? A bitter smile formed inside my mind. No.

Lydia didn’t answer I stared over Damon’s shoulder, my eyes hardening. Claudia, the

mastermind, and everyone involved would fall one by one.

And when that day came, my revenge would not end with them.

Damon Hawthorne would spend the rest of his life paying for what he had done to me.

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Aria's POV

The conversation ended. Or perhaps it simply reached the point where neither of us had anything left to say. Too many truths had been unearthed in one night. Too many wounds had been reopened.

I walked toward the door without looking back. Behind me, Damon remained standing in silence. Just as my fingers touched the doorknob, his voice stopped me.

"I'm not leaving, Aria. I am staying with you."

I slowly faced him. "What?"

"The Werewolf Council will summon you. They'll summon me too." He took another step forward. "We'll face the investigation together."

I studied him carefully. His expression never wavered.

Lydia watched him cautiously. Do we trust him?

No.

Then why are you contemplating agreeing?

Because I wasn't foolish enough to reject someone who had just promised me his resources, his influence, and his protection. Not when the enemy had remained hidden for years.

"Fine," I answered at last. "We'll deal with the Council together."

A faint breath escaped him. Almost like relief. But I felt nothing, nothing at all.

The following morning, the scent of freshly cooked breakfast drifted through the house. Eggs. Toast. Coffee. Bacon.

I smiled faintly before walking downstairs. The dining room was already occupied. Noah sat comfortably beside Elona, helping her spread jam across a slice of toast. She giggled as she made a mess. "Oops."

Noah chuckled. "I think more jam landed on the table than on the bread."

I couldn't help smiling. Then Damon entered the dining room. The atmosphere immediately changed.

Noah's smile disappeared. His scent sharpened with restrained hostility. The two powerful wolves silently measured one another.

Lydia sighed. Those two are exhausting.

Noah's gaze flicked to Damon and then me, displeased but restrained. "Morning. I made enough for Elona and me. Didn't want to presume."

Damon didn't rise to the bait. Instead, he limped over to the table, lowering himself slowly into a chair beside Elona. "Smells good. Mind if I join you, Elona?"

Elona glanced at me first, sensing the storm still churning in my chest. She shook her head, pushing her plate closer to Noah. "No, thank you."

I watched coldly from the doorway. Damon tried everything. Gentle smiles, offering to cut her pancakes into wolf shapes, even telling a soft story about a brave pup who protected her pack.

Elona felt my mood like only a wolf child could. She stayed polite but distant, leaning into Noah's side instead.

By the end of the meal, Damon looked utterly deflated, his broad shoulders slumped in a way I'd rarely seen.

Lydia sighed quietly. Rhein is hurting.

That isn't my concern.

Aria...

He chose this life. The DNA report flashed through my mind. Probability of relationship: 0% Damon believed it. He believed Elona wasn't his daughter.

Only Noah and I knew the truth. The report had given Damon certainty, and I had no intention of taking that certainty away. Not after everything.

Lydia became unusually quiet. You're really not going to tell him?

No, I won't. That would be my revenge.

After breakfast, a nanny arrived to watch Elona. She happily followed the woman into the playroom after hugging me goodbye. 'Til be good, Mommy!"

I know you will."

Once she disappeared, I grabbed my bag. I'm going to the hospital."

Damon was already standing. "I'm coming"

I didn't object. Noah immediately stood as well. "I'll drive

When we arrived at the hospital, I quietly entered Father's room. He was asleep. Machines beeped steadily beside him.

I gently took his hand. "I'm back, Dad"

There was no response

Behind me, Damon walked slowly around the room. Unlike me, he wasn't looking at Father. He was studying everything else. The equipment. The monitors. The emergency systems. Even the nursing station outside.

When he returned, his face had become thoughtful. "This hospital is good, but Silvermoon Medical Center is better."

Noah folded his arms immediately. "What are you implying?"

Damon ignored him and addressed me instead. "Ronan needs specialists."

"He already has specialists."

"Not enough." He continued calmly. "We have advanced neural regeneration equipment. We've recently partnered with wolf healers from the Northern Packs." He looked toward Father. "They will look into his illness."

Hope flickered despite myself. "You think they could help?"

"I don't know. But they'll have better odds."

Silence filled the room. Damon looked back at me. "I think we should transfer him to Silvermoon territory."

"No." The answer came instantly from Noah.

He stepped forward, placing himself between Damon and Father's bed. "Ronan Grayson stays here."

Damon's eyes narrowed. "This isn't about pride."

"No." Noah's voice remained calm. "It's about trust."

The room grew tense. Noah stood between Father's bed and Damon, his expression calm but

unyielding. Damon met his gaze without backing down.

Neither man raised his voice. They didn't need to. The pressure rolling off both wolves was enough to make the air feel heavier.

Lydia shifted uneasily inside me. If they keep this up, they're going to challenge each other.

Not here.

Then stop them before their wolves do.

Before I could speak, Noah folded his arms. "You suddenly care about Ronan Grayson?" His tone wasn't mocking. It was suspicious.

"I care about giving him the best treatment available," Damon replied evenly.

Noah let out a humorless laugh. "Forgive me if I don't find that convincing."

Damon's jaw tightened. "You don't trust me."

"No." The answer came immediately. "I don't."

Silence stretched between them. Noah's eyes hardened. "You've used Aria's family against her before."

Every word landed with brutal accuracy.

"You threatened her with her father. You manipulated her through the Grayson Group. You made her choose between her family and herself."

His voice remained calm. “So tell me, Alpha Damon, what reason do I have to believe you’ve changed?”

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Aria’s POV

Damon didn’t deny any of it. “I don’t expect your trust.”

“You certainly haven’t earned it.”

His Alpha aura stirred for the briefest moment before settling again.

I stepped forward before either of them could continue. “Enough.”

Both men looked at me. I walked over to Noah first. His shoulders remained tense. I placed a hand gently on his arm.

“It’s alright, Noah. Damon can’t hurt my father.”

“You don’t know that.”

“I do.” I looked toward Damon. “He swore the wolf oath last night. It binds him.”

Lydia nodded inside me. That’s right. The Moon Goddess herself enforces it.

I turned back to Noah. “If Damon breaks his word, Rhein dies.”

Noah remained silent. His expression softened slightly, though the distrust remained.

After a long pause, he sighed. His eyes drifted toward Damon. “He might have sworn the oath, but I still don’t trust him.”

I couldn’t argue with that. Noah looked back at me. “Even if Damon means what he says...” He glanced toward Father’s unconscious form. “Taking your father to the country is dangerous.”

“Why?”

“The people behind all this are there.” He lowered his voice. “As long as Ronan remains here, they don’t know exactly where he is. They’re less likely to act.”

His words made sense. “If he returns to the country, they’ll know. They’ll watch him. They may even try to silence him permanently.”

A cold chill ran down my spine.

Lydia’s ears flattened. He’s right.

I looked at Father’s sleeping face. His fingers lay motionless against the blanket. Could they

really? Would they kill a man lying in a hospital bed?

The answer came far too quickly. Yes. If they had murdered Joshua, nothing was beyond them.

Behind me,

colder now.

Damon suddenly spoke. “So your solution is to keep hiding?” His voice was

Noah turned. “My solution is keeping them alive.”

Damon laughed bitterly. “Interesting.”

“What is that supposed to mean?”

“It means...” His eyes narrowed. “You’ve had five years.”

Noah’s expression hardened.

“You took Aria away. You hid her. You kept Ronan under your protection. And yet...”

Damon took another step closer. “...you still haven’t uncovered the truth.”

The room became deathly quiet. “You still haven’t exposed the mastermind. You still haven’t cured Ronan. So forgive me if I’m not impressed.”

Noah’s wolf flashed briefly beneath his calm exterior. His scent sharpened dangerously.

“You think you could’ve done better?”

“I know I would’ve.”

“You couldn’t even protect your own mate.”

The words hit Damon hard. I saw it. His face didn't change, but his scent did. It spiked with pain and regret.

Damon took a deliberate step forward. "And whose scheming stripped me of my mate five years ago?"

Noah's eyes narrowed. "You blame me?"

"You took her away. You kept her from me."

"No, I saved her. I kept her alive."

The invisible pressure between them exploded. Both Alpha auras burst free. The lights flickered. A tray rattled violently. The heart monitor beside Father's bed beeped faster.

Lydia growled. They're pushing dominance.

Not here.

"Stop!" My voice cracked through the room. Both men looked at me.

I pointed toward the door. "Outside."

Neither moved.

"I said outside."

"Aria..."

"No." I glared at Damon first. "This is a hospital." Then at Noah. "My father is lying right there." Neither spoke. "If the two of you want to fight, take it outside."

There was silence.

Finally, Noah looked away first. "Fine."

Damon gave one short nod. "As you wish."

The two men walked out together. The moment the door closed behind them, the room became wonderfully quiet. I released a slow breath.

Lydia sighed. Peace. Finally, we have some peace and quiet.

I walked back to Father's bedside. His breathing remained steady. The machines continued their rhythmic beeping.

I gently opened my handbag. Inside was an old photograph. The edges had faded with age. It was a photo of our family. Father, mother, Joshua, and me. Before everything fell apart.

I carefully placed it into Father's hands. "Dad..."

His eyelids fluttered. Then, slowly, his eyes opened.

My heart leapt. "Dad?"

His gaze wandered until it settled on the photograph. His trembling fingers lifted. Very slowly, he pointed. "Joshua..."

My throat tightened. His finger moved again. "Aria..."

Tears filled my eyes. "I'm here."

His fingertip shifted. "Ronan..."

A weak smile appeared on his face. Then his finger reached the last person. My mother. His

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entire body suddenly trembled.

"Eva..." His voice broke. Tears spilled from his eyes. He stared at Mother's smiling face as though seeing her for the first time in years.

"Eva..." His shoulders shook again and again. The tears wouldn't stop.

"Dad..." I grabbed his hand. "I'm here."

He kept staring at the picture. "Eva..." He whispered her name over and over, like a man desperately trying to hold on to someone already gone.

My own tears finally fell.

Lydia whimpered softly. He remembers all of us. He remembers her.

Yes... he's still in there.

I squeezed Father's hand tighter. "You'll get better. I know you

His tears continued flowing silently.

will."

“I haven’t given up.” I lowered my forehead onto his hand. “I never will.” My voice trembled. “I don’t care how long it takes. I’ll bring you back. I promise.”

Lydia rested beside me inside my mind. He deserves to hear the truth.

He will. He deserves to know the truth about everything that happened.

When I finally wiped away my tears and stood, my decision had already been made. I walked out into the corridor. Both Noah and Damon immediately looked toward me.

“I’ve decided.”

Noah and Damon searched my face.

I looked at Damon first. “I accept your offer.”

His eyes widened slightly.

“We’re moving my father.”

Noah frowned. “Aria...”

I gently raised a hand to stop him. “I’ve thought about it.” I looked from Noah to Damon. “For five years, I’ve been hiding. I’ve been waiting. I’ve been reacting. I can’t do that anymore.”

Lydia stood proudly beside me in my mind. That’s my girl.

I drew in a deep breath if the people behind this conspiracy want my father, they have to come through me. it’s time we stopped onning and faced this conspiracy head-on

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 207

Aria’s POV

The moment our plane landed in Silvermoon territory, I went straight to the hospital with the ambulance carrying my father.

Every second felt painfully slow as the gates of the private medical facility finally came into view. It sat on the highest hill overlooking the Silvermoon Pack

Tall stone walls surrounded the compound, reinforced with silver-lined barriers that could repel rogue wolves and keep intruders from slipping inside unnoticed.

Armed pack guards patrolled every entrance, their scents sharp with discipline and vigilance. This wasn't just a hospital. It was practically a fortress.

Justin was already waiting outside when our convoy arrived.

"The room is ready," he informed me. "Everything Alpha Damon requested has been arranged."

Requested, not ordered. The distinction wasn't lost on me.

I nodded. "Thank you."

The medical staff carefully wheeled my father inside. I walked beside him the entire way.

The chief physician greeted me inside the private suite. "Miss Grayson."

I turned toward him.

"We've reviewed Mr. Grayson's previous records. We'll begin neurological treatment immediately."

"What are his chances?"

The doctor hesitated just long enough for me to prepare for disappointment. "We cannot promise recovery."

My heart sank.

"But this facility has access to treatments unavailable elsewhere. Alpha Damon personally approved every expense."

The doctor continued. "We've assembled specialists from multiple regions. We'll do everything possible."

I nodded and thanked him. I looked back at my father. He looked so peaceful in his sleep.

He's safe, Lydia murmured inside me, her voice low and warm. Damon's people will keep the perimeter. No one slips past them without bleeding for it.

I know. I turned and stepped outside for fresh air. A few seconds later, a voice reached me. It was Noah.

"I still don't like this."

I turned. Noah stood a few feet away, his hands buried inside his coat pockets. He had just arrived at the hospital. I had him take Elona home from the airport first.

His eyes scanned every entrance and rooftop before settling on me.

“You should move your father to Whitemoon Pack.”

I sighed. “Not this again, Noah.”

“Hear me out, Aria.” His expression remained serious. “My territory is more secure than Silvermoon Pack. No one touches what’s under my protection. Your father will be safer there.”

I shook my head. “No, my father needs the best medical care.”

“You don’t think I can provide better treatment than Damon?”

Footsteps approached from behind us. I didn’t need to turn. The mate bond stirred first. It was Damon. He had stepped aside upon our arrival at the hospital.

Lydia immediately rose. Mate.

Behave, I warned. I slowly faced him. Damon stopped a few feet away.

“I just spoke with the medical board,” he said calmly. “They’ll prioritize your father’s recovery. He has a better chance of recovering in this facility than anywhere else, Noah. He stays

here.”

Noah folded his arms and scoffed.

“Forgive me for my lack of confidence in his safety in your pack. Especially since his health problems started in this pack.”

Damon’s expression hardened instantly. “Every guard assigned here answers directly to me. No outsider enters without my approval. He is safe here.”

The air between the two Alphas grew heavier. Even without releasing their Alpha auras, dominance naturally radiated from them.

I stepped between them before either man’s wolf became interested.

“My father stays here.”

Noah opened his mouth. I raised a hand.

“I’ve decided, Noah. He stays.”

He sighed. “You’ve always been stubborn.”

Lydia snorted. He is damn right about that.

I looked at Noah. “I appreciate everything you’ve done, but this facility has resources no one else can match, and Damon arranged the security.”

Noah studied me for several seconds, then he finally nodded.

“If

you change your mind...”

“I’ll tell you.”

He smiled faintly. “You’d better.”

A couple of days later, Dad’s condition remained stable. No improvement, no worsening. I accepted that as a victory.

Ryder asked us to meet. I met him at a bar outside the hospital. His expression alone told me this wasn’t a social visit.

“I found something.”

I lifted a brow. “What is it?”

He placed a folder in front of me. “I’ve been tracking Claudia’s financial movements.”

I opened it. Several pages of bank transfers stared back at me.

Ryder leaned against the desk. He tapped one particular transfer. “Over the past few months, Claudia has communicated repeatedly with an overseas account registered under the name

Silas.”

His expression turned very serious. “The timing isn’t random, Aria. It matches the sabotage at the construction site perfectly.”

A chill crawled down my spine. “This can’t be a coincidence.”

“It isn’t.” Ryder’s eyes darkened. “Whoever Silas is, Claudia reports to him.”

stared at the documents. My fingers slowly curled into fists.

“So...” I whispered. “The person behind Claudia never stopped.”

“No.” Ryder’s voice was grim. “They’ve been moving this entire time.”

Lydia’s growl echoed through my mind. Then we hunt.

I slowly closed the folder. My heartbeat became frighteningly calm. “They’ve had their turn.

Now... it’s ours.”

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 208

Aria’s POV

The Werewolf Council sent for Damon and me. The interrogation chamber sat deep in the Council’s eastern wing, all cold marble and iron-bound doors that swallowed sound the moment they sealed.

A long oak table stretched across the room, with five investigators occupying one side while Damon and I sat opposite them.

The lead investigator, an elderly woman with piercing silver eyes, opened a thick file. “I’m Elder Cassandra.” She introduced the others before her gaze landed squarely on me. “Miss Aria Grayson.”

I met her eyes. “Yes.”

“We’ll begin with your family’s claim over the Grayson land.” My pulse slowed. Here we go. “When did your family first take ownership of the Grayson territory?”

“My great-grandfather inherited it from his father.”

“What proof exists?”

“Official Council registrations. Pack tax records. Blood inheritance documents.”

She nodded once before another investigator interrupted. “And before your great-grandfather?”

“I don’t know.”

“So your knowledge is incomplete.”

“My knowledge begins where the official records begin.”

Another investigator leaned forward. “Has your family ever hidden information regarding the land or altered records?”

Damon spoke before I could. “Those questions are a bit irrelevant. I suggest you focus on why we are here.”

The investigators exchanged looks, and one of them spoke. “Alpha Hawthorne, with respect, we are questioning Miss Grayson.”

“And with equal respect,” Damon replied smoothly, “you are implying criminal misconduct without presenting a single verified piece of evidence.”

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The room became noticeably quieter.

He folded his hands. “If you have evidence, present it. If you don’t, stop asking the same question in different forms.”

The lead investigator cleared her throat. “We’re only establishing facts.”

“Then establish them fairly.”

For the first time since entering the room, the pressure shifted enough for me to breathe again. They redirected their questions toward Damon.

“Why has the Hawthorne family become involved? What interest does Silvermoon have in Grayson territory? Have you personally influenced witnesses? Did you arrange the reopening of historical records?”

Damon answered each one without allowing them to circle back to me, intercepting every attempt.

Hours passed. Questions turned into family history. Family history became bloodlines. Bloodlines became inheritance. Then ancient land rights, then forgotten alliances. Every answer only seemed to create three more questions.

Finally, I couldn't stay silent anymore. "You've spent hours asking about my ancestors."

The room looked toward me.

"But you've barely acknowledged everything that's happened recently."

The lead investigator raised an eyebrow. "What do you mean?"

"My family's company was sabotaged, our estate was infiltrated, my father was attacked, my brother was murdered. There have been repeated attempts to erase my family."

I leaned forward. "Someone has been targeting the Graysons for years. Someone powerful and organized. Someone with access to information they shouldn't have."

The room remained expressionless. I continued. "That is exactly what you should focus on, not the history of the land and our family lineage."

One investigator adjusted his glasses. "Miss Grayson, speculation doesn't help investigations."

"It isn't speculation." I pulled several documents from my folder and placed them on the table, explaining what they were. The investigators barely glanced at them.

"We'll review the material."

"When?"

"It'll be added to the case file."

"Added?" My voice rose despite myself. "People died. My father is lying unconscious. My family was nearly destroyed, and you're adding it to a file?"

The lead investigator remained perfectly composed. "We decide which evidence is relevant."

Relevant. The word echoed inside my head.

Lydia's hackles rose. They're ignoring it.

I stared around the room. Not one investigator looked surprised, not one looked curious, not one even seemed interested. It was as though they'd already decided what this investigation was supposed to find.

A chill crawled down my spine as I slowly looked from face to face, too calm, rehearsed, synchronized.

Whenever I mentioned Claudia, whenever I mentioned the attacks, whenever I suggested someone powerful might be manipulating events, they redirected the conversation every single time.

The realization hit me so hard my stomach clenched. The committee might already belong to the enemy. Cold spread through my veins.

Lydia lowered her head. If the Council itself had been infiltrated... then who could we trust?

The questioning finally ended near dusk. There were no conclusions or answers, only another promise that they would "continue their investigation."

As Damon and I walked out of the Council building, I stopped walking by the time we reached

the gates.

Damon stopped beside me. Neither of us spoke for several moments. Finally, I broke the silence. "I think they're compromised."

He didn't pretend not to understand. "So do I."

I let out a bitter laugh. "I walked in believing all I had to do was tell the truth."

"The truth isn't always enough."

"No." I wrapped my arms around myself. "It isn't." For the first time in days, my confidence cracked. "What if they erase everything?"

My voice came out smaller than I intended. "What if they bury the truth? What if..." My throat tightened painfully. "What if proving my family's innocence destroys what's left of it?"

I closed my eyes. "My father is lying unconscious. My brother is dead. If this investigation turns against us, I could lose the only family I have left."

The words finally escaped. "I..." I swallowed hard. "I'm scared."

Damon stepped closer, slowly, carefully, as though approaching an injured wolf. His hand lifted toward my shoulder. Instinct made me step back. "No. I don't need comfort."

His hand froze in midair. The disappointment that crossed his face was impossible to miss.

I took a slow breath. “I need someone who’ll help me fight. I need someone who’ll uncover whoever has corrupted the Council. I need someone who’ll protect my father while I expose the truth.”

I looked directly into his eyes. “If you’re beside me, then don’t hold me. Stand with me.”

For a long moment, Damon simply stared at me. Then his hand slowly lowered, his shoulders relaxing. “I understand.”

His voice was low but firm. “I can’t promise this road will be easy. But I can promise this: you will never fight this battle alone.”

His eyes locked onto mine. “You asked for support and help. That’s exactly what you’ll have.

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 209

Aria’s POV

I met with Ryder in order to plan our next move. The moment I stepped into his office, I knew something was wrong.

Ryder stood by the floor-to-ceiling window, one hand tucked into his pocket while the other held a tablet.

“Did something happen?” I asked.

Without turning around, he answered, “The account has disappeared.”

I blinked. “The overseas account?”

He nodded. “Yes. Silas.”

My pulse quickened. “What happened?”

“I’ve been monitoring every transaction, every login attempt, every encrypted relay connected

to that account.” He turned and placed the tablet on the desk before me. “Last night, everything stopped.”

I stared at the empty activity log.

“That’s impossible.”

“I thought so too.” Ryder folded his arms. “Whoever controls that account erased every digital footprint.”

My heartbeat sped up. “That means they know.”

His expression darkened. “Yes. They know someone’s getting close.”

Lydia let out a low growl inside me.

I looked up. “If Claudia realizes we are onto her, she might run.”

“Exactly.” Ryder walked around the desk until we stood facing each other. “So we don’t give her the chance. We need to make our move fast.”

Silence settled between us. The enemy had changed tactics, which meant we had to change

ours.

We spent nearly two hours reviewing every lead we’d collected over time. Every clue pointed

toward the same invisible figure, Silas. Yet none of them revealed who he actually was.

As the meeting continued, something felt different inside me. Power rolled beneath my skin in restless waves. It had been happening ever since I returned to Silvermoon.

Every day my wolf felt stronger and sharper. My hearing had become more sensitive. Scents lingered longer. Even my reflexes had quickened.

Lydia stretched lazily inside my mind. You’re changing.

Why is that, though? I wondered.

Before I could think further, Ryder suddenly stepped closer. “You’ve been staring at me for nearly thirty seconds. Are you thinking about me?”

“Absolutely not.”

His smile widened. “I’ll pretend to believe that.”

I folded my arms. “You’ve become unbelievably arrogant.”

“I’ve always been arrogant.” He chuckled. The sound was warm, easy, dangerously easy.

Without realizing it, I relaxed. Then his scent reached me. It wrapped around my senses with startling intensity.

My wolf stirred curiously.

Lydia?

She didn't answer immediately. Instead, she took a slow breath. His scent is interesting...

My heartbeat stumbled. Interesting?

Yes, Aria. It feels... familiar. Could he also be our mate?

I stiffened. No. That couldn't be right. Ryder wasn't my mate. Damon was. The mate bond between Damon and me still existed. I could still feel it.

A strange unease settled over me.

Ryder tilted his head. "You disappeared again."

"I was thinking."

"You're doing a lot of that today."

His eyes remained fixed on mine, longer than necessary.

Heat unexpectedly crept into my cheeks. Why? I almost never reacted this way around anyone, least of all Ryder.

Lydia shifted uneasily. You're flustered.

No, I'm just annoyed.

You started blushing first.

I refused to dignify that with a response.

By the time we finished discussing strategy, the sun had already begun to set. Ryder walked me outside. The evening breeze carried the scent of pine through the trees.

Neither of us spoke for several moments. Finally, he broke the silence. "Are you alright, Aria."

mean?"

I stopped walking, "What do you

“Your pulse is racing, wildly.”

Heat licked up my spine. I stepped back.

He smells like storm and pine, Lydia whispered, almost dazed. Like something that belongs...

“Don’t,” I said aloud. “Don’t do the charm thing. We’re working.”

“Working.” He tasted the word, then smiled wider. “Is that what the tension in your shoulders is about? Or the way your wolf keeps brushing against mine every time I get this close?”

My breath snagged. I felt it then, the invisible pull, sharp and sudden, like a hook behind my ribs.

It was not the crushing certainty of a true mate bond. It was something else. Something that made Lydia stumble for half a heartbeat, her usual sarcasm faltering into stunned quiet.

Ryder’s nostrils flared. He went still.

“There,” he said softly. “She answered me.”

“She didn’t.” The denial came too fast.

He leaned in, his voice dropping to a velvet scrape. “Liar. Your wolf just reached for mine. Just once, But once is enough.”

His gaze flicked to my mouth, then back up. “You feel it too. That... pull. Confusing as hell, isn’t it?”

I shoved at his chest. It was solid, warm, and unmoving. “Get out of my head.”

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“I’m not in your head.” He caught my wrist lightly, his thumb brushing the frantic pulse there. “I’m right here, and so is she.”

He paused, then added, “Whatever bloodline you’re carrying, Aria Grayson... it’s answering more than one call.”

The words landed like a blade.

I jerked free. “We’re done talking about this.”

Ryder straightened, the charm sliding back into something cooler and controlled. But his eyes still burned.

“Only for now.” His voice was gentle, almost careful. “Don’t pretend she didn’t falter. Wolves don’t lie to themselves for long.”

I turned around and left.

Back in my room that night, sleep refused to come. I sat by the window with my knees pulled against my chest.

Moonlight spilled across the floor. Lydia lay silently within my mind. Neither of us spoke for a very long time.

Finally, I whispered, “What happened today?”

She sighed. I don’t know.

“You reacted to him.”

Yes, just for an instant.

“Why?”

Trust me, Aria, I wish I knew.

I closed my eyes. “The mate bond...” I pressed a hand against my chest. “I can still feel Damon.” It was faint, weakened by distance, but it was there.

Lydia answered softly. Yes, I feel it too.

The impossible thought formed before I could stop it. “So why did you respond to Ryder?”

She remained silent.

A memory surfaced. Dad’s unfinished stories. The secrets surrounding the Grayson bloodline. The whispers about our ancestors that he always promised to explain “when the

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time was right.”

A chill ran down my spine.

“What if the Grayson bloodline isn’t normal?”

Lydia slowly lifted her head. Go on... what are you suspecting?

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I struggled to say the words. “What if someone with our blood can have more than one fated mate?”

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Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 210

Damon’s POV

Aria and I went together to survey the wetland on the disputed ground. The wetland stank of rot and old blood.

I stood at the edge of the disputed ground with Aria at my side, my boots sinking into the soft black mud while the investigation committee formed a wall in front of us.

Three officials with clipboards and the kind of bureaucratic arrogance that usually worked on

people who didn’t have wolves under their skin.

“Alpha Damon. Ms. Grayson. This area remains sealed pending further review,” the lead woman said, her voice thin against the wind. “Neither of you is authorized...”

Aria stepped forward before I could speak. She pulled a folded set of documents from her jacket and held them out like a blade.

“These are the original land titles. Grayson family holdings, registered and uncontested. The seal was temporary and unauthorized. You need to lift it. Now.”

The woman opened her mouth and closed it. The papers carried the old Council stamp and her father’s signature, still valid, even if Ronan Grayson wasn’t his usual self yet.

Within minutes, the yellow tape came down, and the lead investigator stepped aside. “You may proceed.”

Aria nodded once. “Thank you.”

As we walked past them, I couldn't stop the corner of my mouth from lifting. "You enjoyed that, didn't you?"

She didn't even look at me. "A little."

"A little?"

She glanced sideways. "Fine... a lot."

I chuckled. Rhein rumbled with approval. She fights like a Luna. You chose well, Damon.

I didn't answer because he was right.

The deeper we ventured into the wetlands, the heavier the atmosphere became. Rotting leaves covered the ground. Ancient trees leaned over stagnant pools of dark water. Even the birds avoided this place.

One of my men stopped several meters ahead. "Alpha." He pointed toward the earth. "We found another one."

Aria and I approached together. The skeleton of a rogue wolf lay half-buried beneath the mud. Its bones were unnaturally black. Its claws remained extended, as though it had died trying to crawl away.

I crouched beside it. "There are no obvious wounds."

Aria knelt opposite me. She brushed dirt away from the skeleton. "Look at that."

Several strange symbols had been carved into the ground beneath the remains.

Aria's fingers traced the symbols without touching them. "These aren't random."

She stood and looked toward another location several dozen meters away. "The second body

was found over there. Then another. Then another."

Within the next hour, we visited every place where rogue wolves had died. By the seventh location, a pattern emerged. Aria stopped walking. She looked across the marsh from one marker to another. Her eyes slowly widened.

I followed her gaze. "What is it?"

She picked up a branch and began drawing in the mud. One point, then another, and another. Lines connected them.

Gradually, a massive geometric symbol appeared. A circle. Ancient runes. Interlocking triangles. The rogue wolves hadn't died randomly. They'd died at precise locations.

My pulse quickened. "This looks like a ritual."

Aria nodded slowly. "Yes, it was a sacrifice. They offered lives." Her expression became colder. She studied the completed symbol again. "But the sacrifice failed."

"How do you know?"

She pointed toward the center. "The formation is incomplete. There should've been another sacrifice here." She indicated an untouched section of land. "But nothing happened."

I stared at the empty space. "The ritual never finished."

"Exactly." She inhaled sharply. "They're trying to awaken something beneath this land, but they haven't figured out how."

Lydia spoke through the mate bond, her emotions brushing against Rhein. The land rejected

them.

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Rhein agreed immediately. They probably did the sacrifice wrong.

Aria looked at me. "My father spoke about the sacrifice."

"That means he knows about this." I replied.

"He has to." Her voice grew quieter. "He spent years researching our family's history. He always said this land wasn't simply territory. It was a legacy. If anyone knows how its power truly works..."

"It's him." I finished the sentence for her

She nodded. "My father is the missing piece."

The drive back from the Grayson land was silent. Neither of us could stop thinking about the ritual. If Ronan regained his memories, everything might change. The enemy knew that too.

The moment I got home, I called Justin into my office. He entered immediately.

“You sent for me, Alpha?”

I tossed the investigation file onto the desk. Increase security at Mr. Grayson’s medical facility to the maximum.”

His eyebrows lifted slightly.

I continued. “No staff changes without my approval. Every doctor undergoes another background investigation. Double the guards. Rotate patrol schedules daily. No one enters Ronan Grayson’s floor without biometric verification.”

Justin was already making notes. “I’ll implement everything immediately.”

I looked directly at him. “I don’t care if the person claims to represent the Werewolf Council. No authorization, no exceptions.”

“Understood.”

The door closed behind him.

An hour later, my phone vibrated. The sender’s name caught my attention immediately. Ryder Ashford, I smiled and opened the message.

[Let’s meet at the Werewolf Summit tomorrow, Damon. I want to introduce someone to you.]

Aria’s POV

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The invitation arrived just after breakfast. I had barely finished reviewing the latest security reports from Dad’s medical facility when my phone buzzed.

It was Ryder Ashford. He sent a single message.

[I’m attending the Werewolf Summit tomorrow. Be my companion.]

I stared at the screen. The Werewolf Summit. Every major Alpha, Luna, Elder, and influential pack representative would be there.

Lydia stirred. We're definitely going.

I was already invited, and I intended to go with Noah. Unfortunately, he had called earlier and said he wouldn't be able to make it. He had been caught up in pack affairs lately.

I would have preferred to go with him. But now that he wouldn't be available, there was no

reason to say no to Ryder.

A second message appeared before I could reply to him.

[Besides... I promise not to flirt too much.]

I rolled my eyes.

Liar, Lydia snorted.

A laugh escaped me despite everything. I typed a short reply.

[Fine. I'll go with you, but you have to keep your promise.]

His response came almost instantly.

[Of course, I will. I'll flirt during the coffee breaks instead.]

I shook my head. Impossible man.

Damon's invitation arrived an hour later. He wanted me to attend the Werewolf Summit with

him.

I refused without any explanation. Better the calculated alliance with Ryder than the public claim Damon clearly wanted to stake.

The following morning, Ryder arrived exactly on time. He leaned casually against a sleek

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black SUV, wearing a charcoal suit that looked tailored specifically for him.

When he saw me, a slow grin spread across his face. "You clean up nicely."

"So do you."

He pressed a hand dramatically against his chest. “That’s the nicest thing you’ve ever said to me.”

“Don’t get used to it.”

“It is already too late.” He opened the passenger door. “My lady.”

I raised an eyebrow. “Really? The gentleman act?”

“I can be civilized.”

“I’ll believe it when I see it.”

He laughed as I climbed inside.

The summit was being held inside the Convention Hall, a massive stone building jointly owned by the Werewolf Council.

Luxury vehicles filled the parking area. Pack guards lined every entrance. The air practically crackled with Alpha pheromones.

Lydia lifted her head. There are a lot of powerful wolves here.

I noticed. The moment Ryder stepped out beside me, conversations nearby quieted. Eyes followed us. Whispers spread.

“Isn’t that Ryder Ashford? What is he doing with Ms. Aria?”

I ignored every stare. Ryder didn’t seem to notice them at all. Or perhaps he simply enjoyed

them.

He offered me his arm. I looked at it. Then at him. “This is unnecessary.”

“It’ll annoy certain people.”

I sighed. “I knew there was an ulterior motive.”

“You know me well.”

Against my better judgment, I accepted. The whispers doubled.

We had barely crossed the entrance hall when I felt it. A familiar, powerful, dominant Alpha

aura.

I stopped.

Lydia's ears flattened. Mate.

I turned. Damon stood several meters away.

Ryder's hand rested lightly against the small of my back. It wasn't possessive, just a quiet gesture of reassurance. But Damon watched the contact as if it were a blade pressed against his throat.

He crossed the floor in four long strides, stopping directly in front of us.

"So this is the person you wanted to introduce me to?" His voice was calm, but the tension beneath it was unmistakable.

Ryder smiled faintly and nodded. "Yes, she is."

Damon's gaze shifted between us before settling on Ryder. "When did the two of he asked, keeping his voice low enough that only the three of us could hear.

you meet?"

Ryder shrugged casually. "Does it matter?" He studied Damon for a moment before adding, "Wait... do you know her?"

Damon let out a humorless chuckle.

"Know her?" His eyes never left mine. "She's my woman, Ryder. How do you not know that?"

"We're divorced, Damon," I shot back. "I am no longer your woman."

"That changes nothing, Aria." His voice dropped another octave. "You're still my mate."

Ryder blinked, genuine surprise crossing his face as he looked from Damon to me.

"Wait..." he said slowly. "Aria, the mate you told me about... that's Damon?" His eyes shifted to Damon. "And your ex-wife is Aria?"

"Now that you know," Damon replied, his tone hard as steel, "stay away from her."

Ryder was silent for a heartbeat before a small smile tugged at the corner of his mouth.

“Interesting.” He folded his arms across his chest. “But from what I can see, you’re divorced. I don’t think it’s your place to decide whether I stay away from her.”

The words had barely left his mouth before the atmosphere shattered.

Damon’s Alpha aura exploded outward. Raw and dominating.

Power crashed through the hall like a tidal wave, carrying the unmetry of the Alpha of Silvermoon. The pressure slammed into every werewolf nearby

Gasps echoed around us.

Several ordinary wolves staggered backward, their knees buckling beneath the crushing force.

Ryder didn’t retreat.

His own Alpha aura surged forward in an instant, cold, unwavering, and every bit as commanding. Invisible power collided with invisible power, two true Alphas meeting head on

The air between them seemed to ripple.

Crystal glasses on a nearby table rattled violently before one shattered against the floor

Rhein is furious, Lydia observed with unsettling calm. And... a little afraid. That’s interesting

Before either Alpha could push the confrontation any further, I stepped between them.

The opposing auras crashed over me from both sides.

“I am not anyone’s possession,” I said, my voice sharp enough to slice through the suffocating pressure.

I looked directly into Damon’s eyes. “And I am free to stand beside whoever I choose.

Remember that.”

His jaw tightened.

For one dangerous moment, I thought he would ignore me completely.

Then, with obvious effort, Damon dragged his Alpha aura back under control. The pressure vanished in a violent rush, leaving the room filled only with the sound of uneven breathing.

The wolves who had nearly collapsed slowly regained their footing.

Damon didn't say another word,

He held my gaze for one final second before turning on his heel and walking away.

The rigid line of his shoulders made one thing painfully clear.

This conversation was far from over.

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 212

Aria's POV

The summit officially began an hour later.

Representatives from dozens of packs presented reports on rogue activity, territorial disputes, trade agreements, and the preservation of ancient werewolf traditions.

Most of it was routine.

By lunchtime, my attention had begun to drift.

Ryder had stepped away to speak with another delegation when an elderly Alpha approached

"Miss Grayson?"

I turned toward him. His scent carried age, experience, and wisdom.

"Yes?"

He smiled sadly. "You have your father's eyes."

My heart skipped. "You know my father?"

"I know Ronan well." He extended his hand. "I am Cedric, a representative of the Blackpine

Pack."

I shook his hand.

“I heard about what happened recently at the Grayson land. There is something I need to give you.”

My pulse raced. He reached into his briefcase and removed a worn leather folder. Inside were handwritten notes, ancient diagrams, maps, symbols, and illustrations identical to the sacrifice pattern Damon and I had discovered in the wetlands.

I looked up sharply. “Where did you get these?”

“Your father and I collected them years ago,” he murmured. “Use it carefully, Aria. Finish what your father started. The land is hungrier than they understand.”

I took the folder and put it in my bag. “Thank you.”

He inclined his head and melted back into the crowd.

Lydia’s excitement echoed through me. This would help a great deal in our investigations.

Yes. We’re finally getting closer.

Night had fallen by the time the summit concluded. I stepped outside clutching the precious folder. Immediately, two familiar voices called my name.

“Aria.”

“Darling.”

I looked up. Damon stood beside one vehicle. Ryder leaned against another.

Oh no.

Damon spoke first. “I’ll take you home.”

Ryder laughed. “That’s generous.”

Damon’s eyes narrowed. “You might have brought her here, but I’ll return her.”

Ryder folded his arms. “I don’t think so.”

“I wasn’t asking.”

“And I wasn’t agreeing.”

Lydia groaned dramatically. Not again.

I pinched the bridge of my nose. The two Alphas continued glaring at each other. Neither seemed willing to give an inch.

Apparently, they had both forgotten I was standing there. I sighed, walked past both of them, and hailed a taxi.

Ryder blinked. "Where are you going?"

I looked at him as though the answer were obvious. "Home."

Damon frowned. "Alone?"

"Yes."

Before either Alpha could object, I got into the car, lowered the window, and said, "Good night." Then I told the driver to take me to my destination.

Chapter 709

Claim

The sacrifice materials Cedric had given me were laid open on the table between Noah and me as we flipped through pages of ritual diagrams.

Noah sat close enough that his shoulder brushed mine every time he leaned in to point something out.

"Here," he said, tapping a sequence of glyphs. "The rogue deaths match this exact pattern. Seven points of blood, one central offering. It looks incomplete, though. Whoever tried it stopped short of the final binding."

I studied the diagram. "You're sure?"

"Positive." Noah's voice was quiet, certain. "I've seen variations of this before. My pack has stories about this."

I blinked. "Your pack?"

He gave a small nod. "The Whitemoon Pack preserves older traditions than most packs. Many of our elders spent centuries protecting records that other packs dismissed as myths."

That explained something I'd been wondering ever since we'd begun researching together. I'd noticed it before. Every time we reached an obscure piece of werewolf history, Noah alre

knew it.

“You know far more about these sacrifices than anyone I’ve spoken to,” I admitted.

A faint smile crossed his face. “I grew up surrounded by these stories.” He rested his hand on the ancient book. “My grandfather believed history repeats itself whenever wolves stop respecting it.”

“So all of this...” I gestured toward the files. “These rituals... these seals... they’re Whitemoon traditions?”

“In part.” He shrugged. “Some knowledge belongs to every pack. Some was entrusted only to ours.”

That made sense, even if something about his answer still felt incomplete.

I leaned back in my chair. “So what kind of pack business has been keeping you so busy lately?”

His smile disappeared. Silence stretched between us.

“You’ve been disappearing every other day. I barely hear from you.”

I crossed my arms. “Talk to me, Noah.”

He sighed. “I can’t say, Aria.”

I frowned. “You don’t trust me?”

“Of course I trust you. I trust you more than anyone.”

“Then why keep secrets?”

His eyes softened. “Because if I tell you now, you’ll involve yourself, and I don’t want you anywhere near this.”

I couldn’t help rolling my eyes. “That’s not your decision.”

“It is when your life is involved.”

I stared at him. “When did you become so overprotective?”

His lips curved faintly. “When you started running toward danger instead of away from it.”

I opened my mouth to argue. He raised one hand. His voice carried certainty. “I promise to tell you everything the moment this is over.”

I sighed. “Fine.”

Clam

“For now.” His shoulders visibly relaxed. “If I need your help...” He met my eyes. “You’ll be the first person I call.”

“You’d better.”

“I will.”

He stood, gathering his jacket. The evening had stretched late. The city lights beyond the window were already sharp and cold.

At the door, he paused, then did what he had done since we were children. He leaned in and pressed a brief, careful kiss to my forehead.

The contact was ordinary. It should have felt ordinary.

But it didn’t. Something low and warm uncoiled under my skin the moment his lips touched

My senses flared wide. His heartbeat, the faint shift of muscle beneath his shirt, the way his own breath caught for half a second.

The pull I’d felt around Ryder flared again, different in flavor but just as insistent, re Noah now too.

), I thought sharply.

dia stirred, restless. What is happening? Could he be our mate too?

›, he isn’t, and neither is Ryder, I countered. I had no wish to have more than one mate.

either do I. But our power is waking, Aria, and it definitely has something to do with the

>ah squeezed my shoulder and left.

e door clicked shut.

eturned to the table and pulled the diagrams closer. The seal on the disputed land was >sening. We had confirmed that much in the wetland.

d every day my wolf grew stronger, my senses keener, the strange dual pull harder to
more.

Perhaps the two things were not separate at all.

Perhaps whatever slept under that marsh was waking something in me too.

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 213

Aria's POV

I brought Noah to the land so we could gather more information about the sacrifices.

The land was unnaturally quiet. The kind that made every instinct scream that something was watching from the shadows.

The air smelled of old blood and damp earth. My wolf stirred restlessly under my skin.

Be careful, Aria, Lydia murmured, her voice a low, velvet growl in the back of my mind. This ground is directly connected to what we have been experiencing.

I know, I answered silently, keeping my expression neutral as I glanced sideways at Noah.

He stood a few paces away, hands in the pockets of his dark jacket, his eyes scanning the land with the intensity of someone who had studied maps and old texts for years.

We walked toward the ruined altar where the rogue wolves had been sacrificed.

"This is it?" Noah asked, his voice low.

"Yes, this is it." I stepped forward, the faint pull of residual magic brushing against my senses like cold fingers.

"The records said the sacrifices were performed here during the blood moon. Seven wolves. Their life force was bound into the seal that keeps the old power locked beneath the land."

Noah crouched beside one of the skeletons. "The ritual wasn't completed. From what I know, if it were," he pointed to the ground, "this circle would have been closed."

I frowned. "They failed to complete the sacrifice."

“I think they might have been interrupted.” His fingers hovered over a carving without touching it. “They intended to continue.”

A shiver ran down my spine.

Lydia growled. They’re coming back.

I know.

Noah stood and looked across the clearing. “If we’re going to understand what they’re trying

to accomplish, we need to recreate the sequence.”

Mimiced. “Recreate it?”

Not the sacrifice.” He quickly shook his head. “Only the movements.”

He stared at the markings on the ground again. “Would that be enough to trigger something?”

That would help us know what we’re dealing with.”

It was risky. Every instinct told me to refuse. Yet every instinct also told me ignorance was far more dangerous.

It took a second to breathe. “Fine, let’s do it.”

Noah nodded. “Stay outside the inner circle.” He stepped onto the first engraved symbol and came back to the first three bodies on the ground.

“According to the records, these first three bodies are offered to the moon.” He moved three steps north, then shifted east toward the second symbol. “These three bodies are offered to the earth.”

The wind suddenly died.

Tiffany nodded. “Noah...”

He nodded. His attention fixed on the symbol on the ground as he approached it. “The remaining two bodies are offered to the bloodline that holds the seal.”

When his foot touched the symbol, the entire clearing exploded with silver light. A deafening rumble shook the earth.

Crack iseracebaccost the ground. The air became unbearably heavy. Then something snapped

insideernee

Agony tore through every vein. I cried out as raw power burst from my body. Silver energy erupted everywhere in wide tent waves.

The surrounding trees bent under the force. Massive rocks lifted off the ground before shattering into chaos.

The pressure became unbearable gasped, the sound half scream, half growl, as my wolf surged forward

panic.

Arra! Hoddim Makleetsopp.

I can't stop it!"

Claim

My knees buckled. The world spun violently. Everything inside me felt like it was being ripped apart and rebuilt at once. Silver flames spiraled around my body. The seal beneath the land pulsed in answer.

"Aria!" Noah sprinted toward me without hesitation.

"Don't come closer!"

Another blast of power exploded outward. The shockwave slammed into him. He was thrown backward several feet before rolling across the dirt.

"Noah, go as far away as you can!"

He pushed himself back to his feet almost immediately. Blood trickled from the corner of his mouth. He ignored it completely.

"No, Aria... I won't!"

"Stay back!"

"I said no!" He ran straight through the storm of silver energy. Every step looked painful. The pressure should have forced him to retreat. Instead, he kept coming.

“You’ll die if you come any closer!”

“I said...”

Another blast struck him squarely in the chest before he could finish speaking. He staggered, coughed blood, then kept walking.

“I’m not leaving you!”

Before I could stop him, he reached me. His arms wrapped tightly around me.

He’s shielding us, Lydia whispered, stunned. At great cost to himself.

The instant he pulled me against him, another wave of power crashed into both of us. His entire body trembled. I could hear bones creaking under the pressure. Still, he didn’t let go.

“Look at me, Aria.”

“I can’t...”

“Aria.” His voice remained calm despite the pain. “Please look at me.”

I looked up at him. His face was pale. Blood stained his lips. Yet his gaze never w “Breathe with me.” His scent surrounded me. It was steady, safe, and familiar. “E

hapter 210

I inhaled shakily.

“Out.”

I obeyed. His heartbeat reached my ears.

Lydia gradually stopped struggling. Keep following his instructions. It is working.

Claim

I matched my breathing to Noah’s. Little by little, the raging power began to settle. The silver flames weakened. The crushing pressure eased. The shaking stopped.

Finally, silence returned to the clearing.

I collapsed against him, exhausted. Neither of us spoke for several moments. Only our breathing filled the air.

Noah gently brushed loose strands of hair away from my face. “You scared me. You nearly lost control.”

I laughed weakly. “I think I scared myself more.”

His hand remained against my cheek. “Thank you for coming back.”

I looked up at him. “I should be thanking you. You came for me. You saved me.

He smiled sadly. “There was never another choice.”

My heart skipped. Something had changed. It was not just my power. The connection between us felt warmer and closer, like an invisible thread had woven itself tighter around our

souls.

Lydia spoke quietly. Our bond has deepened. He anchored us.

I swallowed. The realization unsettled me more than the loss of control had.

Noah seemed to notice the change too. His expression softened. “Aria.”

looked into his eyes.

“You already know how much I love you, how much I am willing to protect you.” He took my hand. “Please just give me a chance.”

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 214

Chapter 214

ANTES PROW

Mybbbeaathoaugght. “Noah...”

“Iddorttexgpredtyyout to answer immediately. Heesenilited faintly. “But after what just happened, afferadius dosing you, I was remindeckjust how nuthyyou mean to me.”

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Threementthee impossabte feelings.

1 lowereekmyyagarze. 'I'm sorry, Noah But my heart is tocablood fochoosing anyone right now!

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aanton pof the pain webshared. I thought to Ryderwitose presence stirred
tecoopdam.

instinctss/ could

Them Noath theemaar witonsad just riskechhis life without assecont thought.

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Noahrgently squeezzet my hand. "You don't have to decotect odlag

"I may never decides

Hisssmileccarrieckatradeoffssamness. 'I'll still wait!"

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overhear.

My eyebrows drew together. "I am alone now. Speak. What happened?"

"I've been digging into Silas."

"What did you find?"

“I expanded the investigation.” His tone became colder. “And I found something that doesn’t sit right.”

My grip tightened around the phone. “What?”

“I compared Noah Hargreaves’ communication records with the timestamps of the hacker’s encrypted network.”

My pulse quickened.

“They overlap.”

I looked instinctively toward Noah, who was several feet away.

“What are you saying?”

“I’m saying every time the hacker became active, Noah’s communications also spiked. 1: he is the hacker.”

My heart lurched. “No.”

“I hope I’m wrong, but until we know the truth...” His voice hardened. “Watch Noah carefully.”

The call ended. I slowly lowered the phone. When I reached Noah, he turned toward me and smiled. “Is everything alright?”

I stared at him. The man who had just shielded me with his own body. The man who had confessed he loved me. The man Ryder was now warning me about. My chest tightened.

Ryder’s words echoed in my head, refusing to leave.

No. I clenched my jaw. Noah had just thrown himself into a storm of save me. He had held me together when I was falling apart. There wa the hacker.

I told Noah everything was fine. He studied me for a second longer and smiled

always had. Noah had been with me through thick and thin. How could Ryder suspect someone like him?

Because appearances lie, Lydia whispered.

You can’t possibly believe Noah is the hacker. He wouldn’t do that.

Wouldn’t he?

I frowned. “You heard Ryder. He doesn’t have proof, just matching timelines. That proves nothing.”

It proves nothing, Lydia agreed. But it also proves nothing in Noah’s favor.

I hated that she was right.

Clam

The drive back felt unusually silent. Noah occasionally glanced at me, but neither of us spoke much. When he finally dropped me off, he rested his hand lightly against my shoulder. “Get some rest.”

“I will.”

He smiled before climbing back into his car. I watched him drive away. Only when his taillights disappeared did I allow the smile on my face to fade.

That night, sleep never came. My laptop illuminated the dark bedroom while countless files filled the screen. Old emails, messages, travel records, photos, medical reports.

I searched through everything involving Noah over the past several years.

“What am I doing?”

You are looking for answers, Lydia whispered.

“I don’t need answers.”

Then close the computer.

My fingers froze above the keyboard. I couldn’t. With a frustrated sigh, I opened another folder.

The earliest records dated back years. Noah helping me search for evid

death. Noah introducing me to useful contacts.

Noah arranging security whenever Claudia targeted me. Noah finding in else could obtain.

I smiled faintly. “See? He’s always been helping me.”

Keep looking, Aria.

Carm

I reluctantly continued. I decided to compare the timeline of all the events associated with the hacker to my communications with Noah.

Then I stumbled on a message and frowned. “Wait.”

Lydia immediately stirred. What is it?

“Look at the date.”

I zoomed in on the date in the message. The day the hacker had hacked the Award Committee’s server, Noah had told me he was attending negotiations with another pack.

Several other incidents coincided with Noah’s activities. I thought about how eager he had always been when asking about my progress on the hacker.

Then, I had thought it was because he cared and wanted to help, but now... what if that wasn’t the case? What if he had only been looking out for himself?

I thought about how every piece of information I fed him somehow affected the hacker’s activities, like how the hacker suddenly disappeared and went into hiding after I met with Ryder and asked for his help.

My heartbeat slowed. “No... this can’t be. It could all be a coincidence.”

It could.

“It has to be.”

Does it?

I rubbed my temples. “Noah has saved my life more times than I can count.”

That is true.

“He stayed beside Dad. He never abandoned us.”

That is also true.

“So why doesn’t this fit anymore?”

Lydia let out a low, uneasy whin-

before

Claim

“But if Ryder is right...” The words caught in my throat.

No I refused to finish that sentence. I slammed the laptop shut.

“I’m not accusing Noah based on circumstantial evidence.”

Then find evidence, Aria.

kslowly nodded. “Yes. I will find the truth myself, no matter what it is.”

The next afternoon, I called Noah. He arrived within thirty minutes. “You sounded serious.”

“If found something.”

His expression sharpened immediately. “What is it?”

H

hapter 2112

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 215

pter 2112

a’s POW

ed Noah intornystuby. Then I walked to my desk and pickeduppassmall folder Inside were veral printed pagees.

ey weren’t treat Ryderadhetett me create convincing fakeedattattattooiced authentic ough to food lanyourfamiliar with the hacker’s coding style..

aced the folder omttreedtesk. We been studying the hackersshading methods.”

ah leaned forward. “Whatcold you find?”

hink...” I deliberately passed. If found encrypted traces he accidentally téftüzéhind.”

s eyes narrowed “You’reasure?”

ot completely shruggeetcasually. “But Ryder thinks they’re promising

reached for the folder

was planning to hand everything over to Damon

his reaction was immediate. His hand stopped halfway.

Damon?"

as though it were the most obvious thing in the world. "He has the resources. He can do it!"

→eceptably. "I wouldn't give it to him if I were you."

ness "Because Damn

Claim

Chapter 212

"I'm saying the information may disappear before you ever get the truth." He stepped closer. "Give it to me instead."

I stared into his eyes. "I can investigate quietly."

Without interference. Without politics. Without anyone knowing. It sounded reasonable, too reasonable.

Lydia shifted uneasily. Listen to him. See how he is trying to stop it from getting into anyone else's hands.

Noah continued. "I already have contacts working on the hacker. I can trace these codes much faster than Damon ever could. I'll personally make sure you get answers."

I searched his face. There was concern and determination, not a trace of panic. Not a trace of guilt. If he was lying, he was frighteningly good at it.

"So?" he asked quietly. "What do you say?"

The question pierced straight through me. I wanted to answer without thinking, the way I always had. Instead, I picked up the folder. For one endless second, I simply looked at it.

This is the test, Lydia murmured.

Yes. If he's innocent...

Nothing changes.

And if he isn't... My heart tightened.

Then everything changes.

I looked back at Noah. "You can have it."

Then I placed the folder into his waiting hands. He accepted it without hesitation. "I'll start

immediately."

"Thank you."

He smiled.

Rapter 212

My wolf didn't answer immediately. When she finally did, her voice was little more than a whisper.

Claim

You know what to do, Aria. You have to follow him. We need to find out what he is about to do.

I hated that she was right. I masked my scent with a potion and left the house, trailing Noah. Soon, we arrived at his house.

I stood in the shadows outside, my hood pulled low over my face as the night wind rustled the trees around me.

The moon hung high above the forest. Its silver light should have brought peace. Instead, it only made the knot in my chest tighter.

A few minutes later, Noah stepped out of the house. He wasn't dressed casually. He wore dark tactical clothing instead of his usual jacket, gloves covering his hands.

He paused on the porch and slowly scanned the surrounding woods. His wolf instincts. Checking whether he was being watched.

I immediately lowered my aura and slowed my breathing, despite masking my scent. I couldn't afford to take any chances.

He's careful, Lydia observed. Too careful.

Noah got into his SUV and drove away. I waited another thirty seconds before starting my own car. Far enough not to be noticed. Close enough not to lose him.

The drive took nearly an hour. The farther we traveled, the more deserted the roads became. Eventually, Noah left the highway and turned onto an abandoned logging trail. I parked behind thick trees before continuing on foot.

— welcomed me. Every heartbeat echoed clearly in my ears. My enhanced senses

artially

an almost invisible scanner embedded inside the cracked concrete. A section of the wall silently slid open.

I froze. "What..."

Claim

The opening disappeared again moments after he entered. This was no ordinary safehouse. Someone had invested heavily in hiding this place.

I circled the building carefully until I found a broken ventilation window near the roof. With one jump, I landed silently on the ledge. Peering inside, my stomach dropped.

The inside looked nothing like the outside. Rows of powerful servers filled the underground

room.

Large monitors covered one wall. Encrypted communication consoles. Satellite transmitters. Signal boosters. Military-grade equipment. It looked less like a hideout and more like a command center.

Noah walked directly toward the central workstation. Without hesitation. Without asking permission. Like he owned it.

He activated the system using multiple passwords before placing his hand against another scanner. A distorted electronic voice echoed through the room.

"Identity confirmed. Welcome back."

Noah sat down. Several encrypted channels immediately appeared across the monitors. He slipped on a headset. Then spoke.

“Give me the status report.”

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 216

Aria’s POV

The distorted voice answered through the speakers. “The cleanup operation remains secure. No traces leading back to our previous client.”

Previous client? I instinctively raised my phone. The camera zoomed in silently. Click. Click. Click.

Photograph after photograph. Noah at the encrypted terminal. The equipment he was using, the security systems, and even the communication channels.

I captured every detail.

Then another sentence reached my ears. “Damon is still seriously investigating Ms. Stone.”

Stone. My blood ran cold. Claudia Stone.

Noah leaned back in his chair. “That doesn’t matter.” His voice had become frighteningly cold. “He won’t find anything new on her.”

I nearly stopped breathing.

“The evidence connecting her to the attacks was erased long ago. I personally verified ever

server.”

My fingers tightened around my phone. No. No. No.

The distorted voice chuckled. “No one ever suspected the cleanup.”

Noah’s answer was emotionless. “Good.”

Silence followed before another message appeared across one of the monitors. NETWORK ARCHIVES.

Noah calmly opened the archived files. He navigated through them with ease. Not someone investigating, but like someone returning to familiar work.

My hands started trembling.

It is him, Aria. Lydia panicked. He is the hacker.

I zoomed in on the files he opened and took several photographs of them. Then I recorded a short video. I captured everything.

Papter 213

I didn't remember leaving. One moment I was outside the warehouse. The next, I was sitting inside my car with tears running silently down my face.

"No..." The word escaped as a whisper. "Noah... why?"

Memories crashed into me one after another. Noah comforting me after Joshua died. Noah helping me search for evidence. Noah protecting me from Damon.

Noah staying beside my father's hospital bed. Noah taking care of me when I was injured. Noah protecting Elona. Noah risking his life in the Grayson Lands. Were all of those lies?

"Were they?"

Lydia didn't answer immediately. Honestly... I don't know.

"I trusted him. I loved him as a brother and friend."

I know.

"He told me he loved me." My voice broke.

Pain squeezed my heart until I could barely breathe.

Investigate the evidence, Lydia urged softly. Don't let your emotions destroy the truth.

With shaking fingers, I called Damon.

He answered immediately.

"I need your technical team."

His tone became serious. "What happened?"

"I am coming right away. There is something I need them to investigate."

Less than an hour later, I sat inside one of Damon's secure offices.

I told Damon everything that happened. He sent his technical team to work on the evi provided.

They worked through the remaining hours of the night in the secured wing of the Hawthorne

estate.

Justin hovered silently.

Damon himself never left my side. His Alpha presence pressed against my skin like a physical weight, protective, furious, and barely leashed.

Claim

I sat on the edge of a metal table, my knees drawn up, watching the analysts. They connected my phone to their system. The photographs appeared first. Then the videos.

One analyst frowned. "Zoom in."

Another enlarged the central monitor. "The encryption software..." His fingers flew across the keyboard. "Cross-reference with the hacker's historical attack signatures."

Lines of code streamed rapidly across several screens. The room became silent except for the sound of keyboards. Minutes felt like hours.

Finally, one analyst looked toward another. "I've got a ninety-two percent match."

The second analyst shook his head. "Run the authentication sequence."

Another minute passed. Then his eyes widened. "Ninety-eight percent."

The lead analyst stood slowly. He typed several more commands himself. The database compared server fingerprints, encryption architecture, digital certificates, and private authentication keys.

Finally, a single result filled the center screen. IDENTITY MATCH CONFIRMED. Operator: Noah Hargreaves.

"It's him," the lead analyst finally said, his voice flat.

Another analyst quietly added, "We also recovered archived access logs." He hesitated before continuing. "Mr. Hargreaves was the hacker. He is the one who has cleaned up for Claudia all those years."

Damon's hand tightened on the back of my chair. Rhein, his wolf, was close enough that I felt the echo of a snarl through the mate bond we still hadn't fully claimed.

I stared blankly at the confirmation on the screen. The ironclad proof was now

Noah had been the one helping Claudia every damn time. Every trace, every rec piece of evidence Claudia wanted hidden, Noah had made disappear. The hope in shattered.

Every strange coincidence, every perfectly timed rescue, every investigation, every secret. They all suddenly fit together.

He hadn't entered my life by chance. He had stayed close enough to watch me. Close enough to influence me.

Close enough to gain my trust. Close enough to the Grayson family.

Tears slipped silently down my face. "No..."

Lydia let out the most heartbroken howl I had ever heard. He betrayed us.

Claim

Noah Hargreaves had never been the ally who appeared when I needed him most. He had been the knife aimed at the heart of everything my family had left.

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 217

Aria's POV

I went straight to Noah's office the next morning. The moment I stepped inside, I slammed the folder onto his desk. The sharp sound echoed through the room.

I stood across from him, every muscle in my body rigid, my fingers still pressed against the folder as though letting go would somehow weaken my resolve. I drew in a slow breath.

"I followed you last night."

His eyes flickered for the briefest second. Nothing else.

"I found the safehouse." My voice remained steady despite the storm raging inside me. "I saw the communication equipment."

His fingers slowly curled into fists.

"I photographed everything." I pulled out the reports and spread them across his desk. "Damon's technical team examined the equipment. They confirmed exactly what I was praying wasn't true." He stared at the documents. He didn't reach for them. He didn't deny a single word.

Outside the floor-to-ceiling windows, rain lashed against the glass. Inside, the silence was so heavy it was almost suffocating.

"You've been awfully quiet," I finally said.

Noah leaned back slowly, his gaze never leaving the papers.

He's thinking, Lydia growled. He's deciding whether to lie.

I held his eyes. "Tell me, Noah." My voice barely rose above a whisper. "Were you the hacker?"

He closed his eyes. Long, painful seconds passed. When he opened them again, there was no hesitation.

loded with a

Claudia all this time. The oneessing evidence and covering her tracks

ther knife. Another twist Lydia paceed ftinouslynnside me. Rip him aparar HelbetrayeÉÚSIS.

g my nails into my palms suutitithegaluug Why?"

the first time, Noah looked away. When bapproached you all those years ago" Hisismo e was

heart slowed.

as because of your family's landd

words echoed through my mind My family's and The Grayson land... The seala Everenyingg

had never made sense suddenly fell into place.

me guess, you knew about the Grayson bloodline?/You knew what was sealed beneath our

red at him, unable to process how calmly he was destroying everything I believed in from the very beginning..." I swallowed. "I was your target.

added. "Yes."

Something inside me shattered.

He turned us, Lydia whimpered.

A pain I'd never felt before bloomed behind my eyes. I pressed my forehead against the wall. There I was, Noah's expression changed. Concern flashed across his face.

it." I stepped back before he could move. "Don't you dare do what you care"

A

care." His voice cracked. "And I mean it."

A low laugh escaped me. "You seem to mean everything apparently."

He looked at me, and I knew he was serious. Finally, Noah spoke.

My heart was racing. His voice sounded exhausted: "We've lost too much. The birthrate kept falling. Every generation grew weaker than the last."

My gaze drifted toward the rain outside. The elders searched every corner of the

Date 274

find."

Then he looked back at me. "They found yours. The Grayson bloodline. The power beneath the

land. They believed it was the only thing left that could save my people."

Lydia snarled. His people. At the cost of ours.

"So you came after me." My voice trembled. "You earned my trust. You got close to me. And you

used me.”

His shoulders slumped. “I hate hearing it put that way because it is true.”

He didn’t argue. He couldn’t.

“As for Claudia...” he continued quietly, “I only worked with her because I needed Damon out of your

life. The two of you together complicated everything.”

I stared at him in disbelief. “You helped Claudia destroy me... just to keep Damon away from me?”

“I never told her to hurt you the way she did.” His voice sharpened for the first time. “I wanted arguments, distance, misunderstandings. That’s all.”

“You expect me to believe that?”

“It’s the truth.”

“You covered for her.”

“I erased evidence.” The confession seemed to physically hurt him. “I redirected investigations.

Removed digital trails.”

His jaw tightened. “But every time she went too far...” His voice dropped. “I stopped what I could. I protected you whenever I could without exposing myself.”

I couldn’t believe what I was hearing. “You call that protecting me?”

“I thought...” He gave a hollow laugh. “I thought I could control everything.”

“You arrogant fool.” My voice shook with fury. “You helped the woman who tried to destroy my life, and somehow convinced yourself you were protecting me?”

His head lowered. “I was wrong.”

“No.” I shook my head slowly. “You weren’t just wrong. You were selfish.”

The words settled heavily between us. This time, Noah had no defense.

After a long silence, he finally spoke. "Everything changed." His voice was barely audible. "I never expected to care about you. I never expected to fall in love with you. I never expected you to

Ron 244

become the one person I couldn't bear to lose."

His eyes glistened. "But somewhere along the way..." He looked at me. "It became real."

Lydia let out a soft, conflicted whine. He's telling the truth.

I know. That was the cruelest part. He loved me. But that love had been born from a lie.

"You expect me to separate your feelings from what you've done?" My voice cracked. I can't."

"I know."

"Stop saying you know!"

My aura rippled through the office, shaking everything around us.

Noah never flinched. He simply stood there and accepted it.

"I deserve your anger."

A tear slid down my cheek. "You deserve far more than my anger." My voice trembled with heartbreak. "You deserve my hatred." I looked him straight in the eyes. "You are a despicable man, Noah."

Lydia's voice became unbearably quiet.

We didn't deserve this.

But there was still one question left. The only one that truly mattered. I stared at him for several long seconds.

"My brother... Joshua."

Noah's heartbeat stumbled. The color drained from his face. Hope and dread collided inside my chest. My voice came out as nothing more than a whisper.

"Tell me the truth." I searched his eyes desperately. "Was Joshua's death connected to you?"

H

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 218

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heever killed Joshuis death had nothing to do with reel sweariton the Moon.”

es, Lydia snarled thiside ene pacing.bereeks of half truthss.

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hat caught my attention/Ryder Dammond #also believed there was scoreene@out there backing

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Deobfithe names on my client list butt bbles et itsis only a stand-in, a puppet with deeppppockets

bahthink she’s playing both sides. The ertreppwwweb behind Claudia is still hidden.”

Someone out there wants your family's salad dressing. Someone who knows about the old magic deep in the gutter! They wanted it so badly they'd go after your father and ever know about it."

My head twisted at his words. It was about fifteen years ago that the cause of the maybe that the family was.

The bath has deteriorated a lot because

Apie 25

all the resources I have."

I stared at him, searching for the lie.

"Help me?" I stepped forward, fury rising hot in my chest.

"You betrayed me, Noah. You used my grief, my desperation, my broken bond to keep me isolated. You played on every fear I had about Damon so I wouldn't run back to my fated mate. And now you

want trust?"

His jaw tightened. "Nothing I do will be able to erase what I did. I know that." His shoulders

lowered. "And I'd deserve it if you never forgave me."

My chest tightened. He wasn't asking for forgiveness. That somehow made this even harder.,

"But I'll still help you."

I frowned. "Why?"

His eyes held mine. "Because Claudia isn't acting alone. Someone is pulling her strings, and whoever it is has already proven they're dangerous." He paused. "I'll help you find them."

"Even if I never hand over the Grayson land's power to you?"

"Yes."

He searched his face for even the slightest crack.

“I’ll help you expose whoever is behind Claudia,” he said firmly. “Whether you give the land’s power

or not.”

Lydia snorted. He does have terrible timing.

I stepped closer until only a short distance separated us. I held his gaze. “I would be a fool to believe a word you say, Noah. You betrayed me before. You would do it again if I gave you the

chance.”

His jaw clenched. “I won’t do that. Having to lie to the woman I love all these years had a great toll

on me.”

I took a step back from him. “Your affection for me would not erase what you did. So don’t expect me to suddenly trust you because you finally decided to tell the truth after being caught.”

I turned and headed for the door. Noah didn’t stop m

scent for just a moment. It was powerful... but controlled.

A reached the door, his voice followed me.

“The day will come when you’ll need me, Aria.”

My hand paused on the doorknob, but I didn’t look back. “I doubt that.”

“You will.” There was absolute certainty in his voice. “And when that day comes, I’ll answer.”

I opened the door and stepped out, closing it quietly behind me. The soft click echoed through the hallway as silence settled around me.

Lydia sighed inside me. Do you believe him?

I closed my eyes. My voice came out barely above a whisper. “I believe that he’s capable of telling the truth.”

A painful ache settled in my chest. “But I also believe he’s capable of betraying me again.”

Lydia didn’t argue. Neither did I. Because deep down... I knew that both could be true.

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 219

Aria's POV

I refused to waste another second thinking about Noah. Whether he had spoken the truth or not no longer mattered.

Trust, once broken, wasn't repaired by confessions. It was rebuilt by actions, and Noah had a long way to go before I could ever believe another word from him.

Good, Lydia said, her voice steady inside my head. We have more important prey.

A bitter smile tugged at my lips. Claudia.

Exactly.

Later that day, I headed straight for Damon's temporary operations office inside the estate. Justin was already waiting. He rose the second I entered.

"Luna..."

"I told you not to call me that. I am not married to Damon anymore."

He awkwardly cleared his throat. "Miss Grayson."

"That's better." I smiled.

He placed several folders and a laptop on the desk. "Alpha Damon and his team have been monitoring the overseas financial channels you requested."

My heartbeat quickened. "Any results?"

Justin nodded. "Quite a few." He opened the laptop, bringing up several encrypted transaction

logs.

Damon walked in moments later. His scent reached me before I saw him. He stopped beside me.

"I didn't interrupt anything, did I?"

“No, Justin was just telling me about the overseas financial channels.”

He glanced at the screen. “Yes, about that, we finally intercepted Claudia’s communications.”

I immediately pulled the chair closer. “What did you find?”

Damon tapped several keys. Rows of encrypted messages filled the display. “They’ve been communicating through offshore accounts.”

My eyes scanned the conversations. None of the messages contained names. Only numbers,

Phapte

‘I don’t know.” My pulse hammered against my ribs.

Lydia remained silent. I stared at the man on the screen. Please don’t let there be another one. We had already been betrayed by Noah. We can’t suffer another betrayal from someone close.

Every instinct I possessed screamed that I wasn’t imagining this. The familiarity wasn’t a coincidence. I knew this man. I just couldn’t remember who he was.

Damon quietly broke the silence. “I’ll have my people enhance the footage.”

I nodded without taking my eyes off the screen. “Alright, please do.”

“We’ll compare his height, build, and gait against everyone connected to Claudia.”

“Not just Claudia.” I finally turned to look at Damon. “Me too. If this man has been close enough for

me to recognize him without seeing his face, then we’re not hunting a stranger.”

I felt Lydia’s unease bleeding into my own. The room seemed to grow colder.

“We’re hunting someone who’s been hiding in plain sight.”

No one spoke after that. The frozen silhouette remained on the screen.

couldn’t shake the terrifying feeling that Noah hadn’t been the only traitor standing close enough

to stab me in the back.

Who could this be?

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 220

Aria's POV

A couple of days later, just after sunset, my phone vibrated across the bedside table.

It was Ryder.

A knot tightened in my stomach. I answered immediately. "What happened?"

"It's about Claudia."

Every muscle in my body went rigid. "Have you found any new information?"

"She is on the move." His voice was calm, but I could hear the tension beneath it. "She knows" someone has been closing in. She wiped several servers and booked a flight out of the country."

My pulse quickened. "Where is she at the moment?"

A keyboard clicked in the background. "She's on her way to the airport."

Lydia's ears shot upright inside me. She's really trying to escape.

Ryder continued, "I intercepted the airline database. I have her flight number, terminal, gate, everything. I will be on my way now."

Good. Very good.

"I'll head out now too and meet you there."

I ended the call before he could say anything else.

Don't let her slip away, Aria, Lydia growled.

"I won't."

The airport was already overflowing with travelers. Families hurried past with luggage. Business executives barked into phones. Children laughed as they chased each other through the terminal. The ordinary noise felt surreal. None of these people knew a monster was walking among them.

I followed Ryder's scent before I spotted him. He stood near one of the departure displays, dressed casually enough to blend into the crowd. The moment he saw me, he walked over.

"Gate Twenty-Two," he said quietly. "Boarding starts in fifteen minutes."

"You kept eyes on her?"

He nodded. "She dumped three phones, burned two fake passports, and destroyed whatever was carrying before she entered security."

My jaw tightened. "She's covering her tracks."

"Which means she's scared."

Lydia's tail flicked. That's good.

I spotted Claudia before she spotted me. She stood near the boarding gate wearing oversized sunglasses and a cream-colored coat. Anyone else would have mistaken her for another wealthy

traveler.

I smelled the fear beneath the expensive perfume. Her heartbeat was faster than normal. She kept checking the crowd, waiting, searching, and looking for danger.

Then her eyes landed on me. Everything froze. For one heartbeat... neither of us moved. Then her lips curled into a mocking smile.

"Well," she called loudly enough for nearby passengers to hear. "If it isn't Aria Grayson."

People slowed as they walked past us. I ignored them.

Claudia folded her arms. "You really are persistent."

"So are cockroaches."

Her smile twitched. "I'll take that as a compliment."

I stopped several feet away. "You look nervous."

She laughed. “Nervous?” She glanced toward the boarding gate. “You think you have it in you to make me nervous?”

Her expression hardened. “Wake up, Aria. You do not have it in you. You never could beat me.”

Lydia snarled. She’s provoking us.

I know.

Claudia stepped closer. “I took your work, destroyed your reputation, even turned people against you.” She smiled. “And here I am.”

”

I didn’t react. “I have no interest in beating you.”

Her smile faltered. “Don’t flatter yourself. That is all you have been trying to do.”

“You are wrong. I don’t care about you anymore.” For the first time, real confusion crossed her face.

only want the person behind you.”

The color drained from her face so quickly that anyone watching would have missed it.

took one slow step forward. “Who is it?”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Liar. There is someone pulling your strings. Who do you answer to?”

“I am a one-woman army.”

“That’s not true. You’ve never been smart enough to orchestrate something this big.”

Her eyes flashed with fury. “You arrogant...”

“So tell me.” My wolf rose beneath my skin. Silver energy shimmered around my fingers before disappearing just as quickly.

The air pressure changed. Nearby wolves hidden among the travelers instinctively stiffened. Humans frowned, unaware of why their instincts suddenly screamed at them to move away.

Lydia stepped beside me inside my mind. Press on, Aria. Make her confess.

“I know someone gave you orders to kill Joshua. I know it is this same person who orchestrated all

the misfortunes that occurred in my family. They want their hands on the Grayson land.”

Claudia flinched. She took one involuntary step backward as I took a step forward.

My aura rolled outward, heavy and relentless.

Claudia’s breathing became ragged. “No...”

“Tell me. Who is pulling your strings?”

“I...” Her knees trembled. Sweat rolled down her forehead. “I can’t...”

“You can.”

“I...” Her lips parted. “I work for...”

“Council Authority!”

ommand sliced through the terminal. Boots thundered across the polished floor.

founded us

Claudia blinked. “What?”

Another agent seized both her wrists.

“This is a mistake! You can’t arrest me!”

“We have warrants.”

She twisted violently. “You don’t understand!”

“I think we do.”

She suddenly looked at me. For a split second... I saw panic.

“Wait!” I stepped forward. “I need to question her.”

The lead agent blocked my path. “I’m afraid that’s no longer possible, Miss Grayson.”

“This investigation concerns me.”

“It now concerns the Council.”

Frustration surged through me. She was about to tell me who was behind all of this after I used my wolf power on her. “Please, I just need to ask her some questions.”

“Our orders are clear.”

The agents dragged Claudia toward the secured exit. She struggled wildly. “You fools!” she screamed. “You have no idea what you’ve done!”

My wolf strained against my control. Go after her! She’s getting away with the truth!

I stared at the empty space where Claudia had stood, the scent of her fear still hanging in the air.

There was no question whose doing this was.

It was clearly the person behind Claudia.

Comments

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 221

hed the Council convoy move toward the airport gates, Claudia was go hit like the had been taken out of my hands before I could force the truth from her.

I slowly released the breath I’d been holding.

Ryder turned to me. “You’re unusually calm”

I tore my eyes away from the departing vehicles “They moved too quickly

His brow furrowed. “You expected this?”

folded my arms and nodded. “If the Council arrested Claudia now, it means someone panicked

Ryder remained silent, letting me continue.

“Think about it.” I glanced toward the airport exit. “She was already running. She destroyed evidence, abandoned every safehouse, and booked an international flight under pressure Whoever she’s working for knows we’re getting close.”

Lydia let out a satisfied growl. Cornered prey makes mistakes.

Exactly.

Ryder nodded. “They took Claudia into custody to protect the person behind her.”

My eyes sharpened. “The mastermind.”

Silence settled between us for only a second. “We need to follow them.”

We rushed to our vehicle and fell several miles behind the Council convoy. Three black SUVs, flanked by armed escorts, moved at a steady, disciplined pace through the dark

“They’re taking the mountain route instead of the usual holding facility,” Ryder observed.

‘Someone’s rerouting them ’

“Keep our distance. Far enough back that they never know we’re there.”

Ryder kept the headlights dimmed “No signs they’ve noticed us,” he said after a long stretch

“Keep it that way.”

Lydia suddenly froze. Aria

My heartbeat skipped What is it?

Lydia paced frantically. I can sense something coming, but I don’t know what it is.

She was right. I could feel it too.

A strange pressure settled over my chest. I clenched my fists.

Ryder glanced over. “What happened?”

I shook my head. “I don’t know.”

The convoy disappeared briefly around a sharp bend in the mountain road. For just a second, it vanished from sight. The hairs on the back of my neck stood up. My pulse spiked. Every instinct

inside me screamed.

“Ryder, slow down.”

He eased off the accelerator without question. The distance between us and the Council vehicles

widened.

Lydia pressed herself hard against my consciousness. The truth is close.

I swallowed. "I know."

The unease never left me. It only grew heavier.

The Council convoy changed routes twice within the next hour. Eventually, they turned into an industrial district on the outskirts of the city, black buildings rising like teeth against the night sky.

Ryder glanced at me from the driver's seat. "They're slowing down."

I followed the taillights ahead. "So do we."

Our car rolled to a stop half a block away. The convoy had pulled into a fenced government compound. Council agents climbed out first. Then Claudia.

Silver suppressor cuffs still bound her wrists. She kept scanning her surroundings, as if she was waiting for something or someone.

Lydia lifted her head. She's nervous.

Ryder quietly opened his door. "We move on foot."

I nodded. "Cover the east side. Stay close enough to hear me."

"Got it."

He disappeared into the darkness along the perimeter

I slipped the opposite way, keeping low against the wall. The scent of Council wolves filled

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nose, and beneath them... a scent I couldn't identify.

Lydia's ears flattened. It's back. The scent from the mountain road.

My pulse quickened.

I climbed onto the roof of an abandoned warehouse overlooking the compound. From there, I had

a perfect view under the thin light of the compound lamps.

Council agents escorted Claudia toward the main building. Then everything changed,

The compound lights died. Alarms blared. Shouts erupted below.

A second later, emergency lights flickered on, bathing the yard in a harsh red glow. There was

chaos.

Council wolves rushed in every direction. Someone screamed. A gate exploded inward. Smoke

poured across the concrete.

Lydia snarled. Aria, move... now!

I didn't hesitate. I jumped from the roof. My wolf strengthened the landing as I hit the ground

running.

Ryder appeared from the east side a heartbeat later, already moving with me. We tore through the

confusion. Someone had cut the power. Someone had planned this.

"There!" I shouted.

Through the drifting smoke, I caught sight of Claudia. She was running. The silver cuffs were gone. She sprinted toward the rear exit without looking back.

"She's escaping!"

Ryder veered left to cut off one path. I went straight after her.

"Claudia!"

She glanced over her shoulder. The moment she saw me, panic flashed across her face. She

pushed herself even harder.

Lydia surged forward. Faster!

I vaulted over a fallen barricade. The distance between us shrank. Twenty meters was almost close enough to grab her.

Then she stopped.

It was not because I'd cornered her, but because someone stepped out of the shadows o
G

A hooded man.

He emerged as if he had always been standing there. He had the same back frame as the man inside the Silas safehouse. The same man who felt strangely familiar.

Claudia rushed straight to him. They exchanged only a few hurried words, too low for me to hear. The man nodded once. Then he grabbed her arm.

I lunged forward.

The hooded man looked up for only a fraction of a second. Just enough for the hood to shift. A sliver of his face caught the red emergency light.

My feet stopped moving.

No... it wasn't possible.

That jawline... that nose... the angle of his cheek...

Every nerve in my body went numb. My heart slammed against my

"I know him..."

Lydia froze. Aria...

ribs.

The man turned away, pulling Claudia with him. My body finally obeyed. I ran. Every ounce of strength exploded from my muscles.

"Stop right there!"

They were already disappearing between abandoned buildings. I chased them without thinking, without breathing, without hearing Ryder shouting my name somewhere behind me.

Nothing mattered except that face.

The hooded man suddenly released Claudia. She kept running. He didn't.

Instead, he turned to face me.

He stood perfectly still, waiting.

Lydia roared inside me. Be careful, Aria!

I ignored her. I was only a few steps away.

"Who are you?"

Comments

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 222

and dirt to answer reached him. He moved to box fast. Chernoooneent he was standing still. The

pamoxplotted across my ribs. His fist crashed inuitonystalde with terrifying force.

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etebeneath me in. Lushed from my lungs. al cougheck/vobe

Howler Akta!

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ried Likes Hardnewerbeen a threat: Something about the way heg nooved felt painfully fanmilian

suddenlyniaderbstharply. Then she went completely sheet

There was no answer

His voice returned to a soft whisper. That scent.

He was close enough now that his scent wrapped around him, and the world shattered.

Thoughts.

He whimpered, knowing this scent. It sounded frightened, cool, new, like it was the scent of fresh blood.

His body stiffened, and he trembled. "No..."

The man reacted, but slowly. He felt his hood. His world stopped.

His hair and face came into full view. The same sharp features, the same eyes looking up.

The same face from every photograph. Only the eyes were different. The world was empty.

A void of warmth.

He didn't breathe. "Joshua?"

His face broke from his lips like a prayer. His brother took a step toward him. No recognition, no belief. Nothing. Nothing.

He cried out. It can't be! We're here.

He blurred his vision: "Joshua..."

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He tilted his head slightly, as though he were looking at a complete stranger. Then he attacked.

again.

I barely raised my arms before his kick slammed into them. The force threw me backward. Agony shot through my shoulders. He closed the distance instantly.

He delivered another punch, another strike. Each one precise and merciless. This wasn't my

brother. Or if it was... the Joshua I knew was gone.

"Joshua!" I shouted desperately. "It's me!"

There was no response. His fist came down again.

Before it could reach me, a blur shot between us. The impact of two powerful wolves colliding shook the ground. The hooded man took one step back. Standing between us was Noah.

His breathing was steady, but his eyes never left Joshua. "You always have terrible timing," Noah

said without looking at me.

I struggled to my feet. "What are you doing here?"

"I told you." His voice was calm. "You'd need me."

Joshua's emotionless gaze shifted to Noah. The two men stared at each other in silence. Predators measuring predators.

Noah's own wolf pressed against the surface, dominant and unyielding.

"Aria, you need to leave. He's dangerous," Noah said quietly.

"I'm not leaving Joshua!"

"That's not Joshua."

The words hit me like another blow. Joshua attacked again, Noah met him head-on. Their fists collided with a crack that echoed through the alley.

The shockwave sent loose debris skittering across the cracked concrete.

During that brief clash, Claudia reappeared beside Joshua. He caught her wrist without taking his eyes off Noah. Then both of them retreated in one impossibly fast movement.

By the time the echoes faded, the alley was empty. Only the cold night air remained.

I stared at the place where my brother had vanished. My legs finally gave out beneath me
Joshua smiled at me beneath the old oak tree behind our childhood home. Sunlight filtered

G

through the leaves, warming his face as he held out a carved wooden wolf.

“I made it for you, Aria.”

I laughed, taking it from him. “It’s ugly.”

“No, it is not.”

“It has one ear bigger than the other.”

“That gives it character.”

!‘ giggled as he chased me around the tree, threatening to steal it back while Father
watched from

the porch with an amused smile.

Those had been happy days. Days before betrayal and bloodshed.

Joshua caught me by the wrist, ruffling my hair exactly the way he always used to.

“You’ll always be my little sister.”

“I’ll grow taller than you one day.” I smiled.

He snorted. “That would never happen.”

The warmth around us suddenly disappeared. The birds stopped singing. The breeze died.

Everything became unnaturally still.

Joshua’s hand tightened around my wrist. Too tight. Pain shot through my arm.

I frowned. “Josh?”

His smile slowly vanished. His eyes... those gentle amber eyes turned completely empty,
cold and

lifeless. As if someone had stolen his soul.

The corners of his mouth twisted into something unfamiliar and monstrous.

“You need to die.”

My heart stopped. His fingers became claws. The carved wooden wolf fell from my hand and

shattered against the ground.

“Joshua...”

He stepped closer. “I would kill you,”

“No...”

He lunged. His claws aimed straight for my throat.

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HE

+25 Paint.

ARIA! Lydia slammed into my consciousness. WAKE UP!

jerked backward with a terrified scream. My eyes flew open. I couldn’t breathe. Every breath

came in painful gasps as sweat soaked my clothes. The room spun.

“Aria, I am here.” A familiar voice said. It was Damon.

Noah’s familiar voice followed almost immediately. “Easy, Aria.”

Then came Ryder’s. “You were only dreaming.”

I blinked rapidly until the room finally came into focus. All three of them stood around my bed. Damon was closest, looking more worried than I’d ever seen him.

Noah stood rigidly near the window, every muscle in his body tense. Ryder leaned against the wall

with folded arms, though the concern in his eyes betrayed his relaxed posture.

For several seconds, none of us spoke. I couldn’t. My chest still hurt. My hands trembled

uncontrollably.

That wasn't just a dream, it felt so real, Lydia growled.

know. I squeezed my eyes shut. Joshua's face. Those empty eyes. That murderous expression. They wouldn't leave me alone. Again and again, it kept replaying inside

"No..." I whispered to myself.

"Aria." Damon crouched beside the bed. "Look at me."

my head.

I forced myself to meet his gaze. His expression softened. "It wasn't real."

I laughed bitterly. "It felt real."

Silence settled over the room until Noah finally broke it.

"There... there's something I should have told you a long time ago."

I looked at him. His jaw tightened.

"I didn't know if it was important then."

My pulse quickened. "What is that?"

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Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 223

Aria's POV

Noah exhaled slowly. "Over the past few years, I found out Claudia met with the same man

repeatedly."

The room became deathly quiet.

“He always kept his face hidden,” Noah continued. “Most of my informants never got a clear look. I couldn’t confirm his identity.”

Noah rubbed a hand over his face. “Eventually, one of my spies managed to glimpse his face.” He looked directly at me. “I thought...” He hesitated. “I thought he looked like Joshua.

Noah’s expression became heavier. “I convinced myself I was wrong.”

I sighed. “You should have told me.”

“I know.” His voice was filled with regret. “But how could I?” He swallowed. “You buried him.”

I saw you mourn him. I couldn’t destroy you with something I wasn’t even sure about.”

I stared at him. Part of me wanted to be angry. Another part understood exactly why he had remained silent. If someone had told me years ago that Joshua was alive, I never would have believed them.

Me neither, Lydia said quietly. I wouldn’t believe he was alive without proof.

I closed my eyes. The blood inside me stirred. A strange warmth spread through my veins. The familiar connection suddenly surfaced. It was faint but unmistakable.

I pressed a trembling hand against my chest. The bond I shared with Joshua was still there. I had always shared that invisible connection with Father and Joshua.

One had weakened after Father fell into his coma. The other... I’d believed it had disappeared

but he had died.

But I could feel it again. Weak

Chapter 220

Damon stepped closer. “You can sense him?”

I nodded. “The blood bond.”

Understanding flashed across Damon’s face.

“He truly isn’t dead,” I whispered. “He never was.”

Nobody spoke. The realization settled over all of us like a crushing weight.

+25 Point:

Ryder finally broke the silence. "If Joshua, your brother, is alive, then why is he helping Claudia?"

My heart twisted painfully. "He wouldn't."

Damon looked at me carefully. "The Joshua you knew wouldn't."

Those words hit me hard because they were true. Joshua had spent his entire life protecting me. He would have died before hurting me.

Yet... he had tried to kill me. His eyes held no recognition, no love, nothing. Only hatred.

Noah slowly stood. "I've been thinking about that. What if Joshua never chose Claudia?"

I looked at him.

"What if someone else got to him first?"

A name immediately surfaced in my mind.

"Silas."

Noah nodded. "Silas must have captured and brainwashed him. Maybe he even erased his memory."

Damon's expression darkened. "I agree."

Ryder cursed under his breath. "It would explain everything."

I felt sick to my stomach.

Lydia whimpered inside me. He stole our brother.

I gripped the blanket so tightly my knuckles turned white. "That means he wouldn't even know who

he is."

Damon's voice remained calm. "Yes. He wouldn't know you. He wouldn't know your father wouldn't remember any of his life."

Only his orders and his mission.

DIG

F

+75 Pom

Tears finally escaped despite my efforts to hold them back. Joshua hadn't abandoned us. Josia

had been stolen. Everything inside me shattered.

Noah stepped closer. "I'm sorry for everything I did, Aria. For all the secrets and lies. I can't change the past or all the wrong I have done to you," he said quietly.

"But I can help now." He held my gaze. "I want to help bring Joshua home."

The room remained silent long after Noah's words faded.

I want to bring Joshua home.

So did I, more than anything. But wanting something and achieving it were two very different things

I wiped the tears streaming down my face and forced myself to breathe evenly. Emotion wouldn't save Joshua. A plan would.

I looked from Noah to Damon, then to Ryder. "I'm done letting Claudia and Silas stay ten steps

ahead of us."

Damon's sharp gaze settled on me. "What are you proposing?"

straightened despite the heaviness in my chest. "A deal."

Noah blinked. "A deal?"

I nodded once. "We set everything else aside."

Every argument, every betrayal, every grudge, every broken promise. None of it mattered if Joshua was still out there.

"If you help me dismantle Silas's organization and bring Joshua back..." I met Noah's eyes. "I'll give your pack a portion of the land's power."

There was silence, absolute silence. Noah stared at me as though he hadn't heard correctly. Even Damon looked surprised.

Lydia lifted her head. You're trusting him?

No, I answered honestly. I'm trusting necessity.

The sacred land carried ancient power. Power Noah desired. Power that could strengt for generations. Offering even a portion of it was no small concession.

back

Noah slowly found his voice. "You'd do that?"

"I'm not giving it away for free." My tone remained calm. "This is a business arrangement. Disappointment flickered across Noah's face for just a moment. Then it was gone almost as

G

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quickly as it appeared.

+25 Pant

He lowered his eyes with a faint, bitter smile. "So, no favors, no second chances, no personal feelings... Just terms."

I nodded. "Exactly."

He let out a quiet breath. "I suppose that's better than nothing." There was no resentment in his

voice, only resignation. "I accept."

He extended his hand. I stared at it for a second before shaking it.

The moment our hands separated, Noah's expression shifted completely. The warmth disappeared. The strategist took over.

"Then let's begin." He pulled a laptop onto the table. "I've spent years collecting fragments on Claudia." His fingers flew across the keyboard. "If Joshua has worked alongside her for years, he'll

have left a trail.”

Ryder walked over. “I’ll handle the political side.” He slipped out his phone. “If Silas has survived this long, they’ve bought protection. They’ll have people inside the Council.”

Damon folded his arms. “They do.”

Everyone looked at him.

“Whoever this Silas is, his reach is far and wide. Even most of the Council agents are on his side.”

Damon looked directly at me. “I’ll have Justin mobilize our intelligence network. If Joshua is moving anywhere within Silvermoon territory... we’ll know.”

I nodded gratefully. “Thank you.”

Damon simply inclined his head. “No thanks. We’re bringing him home.”

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 224

Aria’s POV

Damon’s words eased something inside me. Not much, just enough

Hours passed. Maps covered the conference table. Photos, financial records, council reports, satellite images. Everything blurred together.

Noah barely stopped typing. His laptop displayed dozens of encrypted windows. I watched lines of code flash across the screen faster than I could follow. His finger never paused.

“I’ve recovered security footage.” Another window opened. we accessed travel databases, bank records, and private communications.”

Ryder whistled. “I am one of your clients, but forget how terrifying you are.”

Noah smirked faintly. “I’ll take that as a compliment

Minutes later, another map appeared. Red dots covered several countries.

“Joshua moved constantly.” He enlarged the display. He moved every few months, with no predictable pattern.”

I frowned. "They kept relocating him."

"Exactly." Noah highlighted several locations. But there are overlaps." He zoomed in again. "They always return to the same region."

Damon stepped closer. "What does that mean?"

"It means they have a headquarters."

My pulse quickened!.

Noah typed another command. "I'm narrowing the radius." The red dots slowly disappeared until only one cluster remained. There""

Ryder leaned over "So that's where they're hiding."

"No." Noah storkisthead. "That's the operational range. The base is somewhere inside it: It narrowstties search considerably

Daman immediately pulled out his phone. "Justin." His Alpha voice became clipped and authoritative. "I want surveillance teams deployed immediately." He listened briefly, then sent Justin the coordinates:

They are to only watch, not engage. We are dealing with very smart and dangerous people

He ended the call. They'll begin within the hour."

Ryder checked his own phone. "I've also reached out to my contacts."

"When can we meet? Lasked.

t Chapter 221.

"The ones who enjoy exposing corrupt politicians." He smiled without humor. "Council members aren't nearly as loyal as they pretend."

Within another hour, Ryder received several encrypted files. He opened them one after another.

"I knew it." He looked at Damon. "You were right. Half the officials voting against your investigations received unexplained payments."

Damon's jaw hardened. "Names."

Ryder slid the tablet across the table. "There."

I recognized several immediately. They were the council elders who had investigated Damon and me.

“They’ve been bought,” Ryder said. “Every one of them.”

Noah leaned over the list. “And every payment traces back to shell companies.” He typed rapidly again. “I

can work backward.”

My heart pounded faster. Everything was finally connecting. Claudia, Silas, the corrupt Council, Joshua. It was one web, one enemy, and one target.

Noah suddenly froze. “I found something.”

We all turned toward him. His fingers slowed. A map filled the screen. A dense mountain range. Hidden roads. Underground structures. Several abandoned facilities. He enlarged one location.

“This.”

“What is it?” I asked.

He inhaled slowly. “I can’t prove it yet. But... I’m ninety percent certain this is one of Silas’s primary bases.”

Nobody spoke. After everything... we finally had something real.

Damon studied the coordinates. “It’ll still take time.”

“I know.”

“They’ll relocate if we rush.”

Ryder nodded. “We need confirmation first and a full layout.”

I agreed. Joshua had survived this long. I wasn’t going to lose him because of impatience.

“We do this properly.”

Everyone nodded. For the first time... we were working as one.

Relief should have followed. Instead... an odd wave of dizziness washed over me. I grabbed the edge of the table. The room tilted.

Lydia stirred uneasily. Something’s wrong.

I know. Heat spread beneath my skin. It was not painful. Just... intense. As though molten silver

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through my veins. My heartbeat became irregular Thump. Thump. Thump-thump. My breathing hitched.

Damon looked over first. "Aria?"

I tried to answer. Instead, a strange warmth rolled through my body. It settled low in my stomach before racing outward.

Lydia whimpered. I am changing.

It had to be the sacred land. Ever since the sacrifice was attempted, Lydia had become increasingly unstable.

Some days she was stronger than ever. Others... it felt as though two different wolves lived inside me.

Another wave struck. I swayed. Noah caught my arm before I could fall.

"Easy."

The instant his fingers touched me, all three men went completely still. The air changed. No... the room changed.

Damon's head snapped toward me. His pupils expanded. Ryder inhaled sharply. Noah's entire body stiffened.

Confusion flickered through me. "What..."

Then I smelled it. A rich, intoxicating scent drifted from my own skin.

Lydia's ears shot upright. They're reacting.

Noah's breathing became noticeably heavier. His usually calm eyes darkened. Deep beneath his carefully controlled exterior, I could sense his wolf.

Damon's golden eyes flashed for the briefest second, Rhein was close to the surface. Very close.

Ryder clenched his fists so tightly the wood beneath his hand cracked.

Three Alphas. Three dominant wolves. All staring at me with raw, primal, hungry instinct.

Lydia growled inside me. Careful. Their wolves smell

My pulse quickened. The mate bond between Damon and me pulsed violently. At the same time, I felt the oppressive weight of two other Alpha instincts pressing against the room.

Noah took one careful step backward, his jaw visibly tightening. “Everyone...” His voice had become rough. “...keep your wolves under control.”

Damon didn’t take his eyes off me. “I’m trying.” But judging by the low rumble vibrating in his chest... P wasn’t making it easy.

And neither was Lydia.

Heat coursed through my veins, spreading from my chest to every inch of my body until even breath became difficult. It wasn’t pain. It was worse. It was hunger for something I couldn’t explain.

stagged back, gripping the edge of the table. Lydia’

Ti know. My wolf sounded strained. I can’t calm it.

The scent pouring off my skin grew even richer Moonflowers, rain, and wild earth mixed with something ancient that made the wolves around me restless.

AA low growl rumbled through the room Damon. His golden eyes flashed as Rhen surged forward.

AAcross from him, Noah’s shoulders stiffened. Though his expression remained composed, his pupils had eelongated into narrow wolf slits.

Ryder’s fists clenched so tightly the veins in his forearms bulged.

I swallowed hard. “What... what’s happening to me?”

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Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 225

+25 Prants

Aria’s POV

Nobody answered immediately. Another wave of heat slammed into me. My knees nearly gave out. Damon caught himself before taking a step toward me.

At the exact same moment, Noah moved.

“So you do smell it too,” Damon said coldly.

Noah stopped without taking his eyes off me. “You think I can ignore it?”

Ryder let out a humorless laugh. “None of us can.”

The three of them instinctively spread out, forming a rough triangle around me. Not to protect me, but to keep each other away from me.

Lydia growled uneasily. They’re circling. Like rival Alphas.

The mate bond inside me suddenly pulsed hard. My heart skipped. Damon inhaled sharply. Rhein’s possessiveness crashed into the room like a tidal wave.

“Nobody touches her.” His Alpha command rolled through the air.

Noah’s lips pressed into a thin line. “I’m not one of your pack, Damon.”

His own Alpha aura answered instinctively, invisible but unmistakable. “You don’t command me.”

The pressure doubled. The windows rattled. The glasses on the table vibrated.

Even Ryder released part of his own Alpha presence. “I suggest both of you calm down. I’d rather not tear this room apart.”

My ears rang beneath the clash of three dominant wolves. “Stop...” None of them heard me.

Damon’s gaze never left Noah. “You move one more step toward her...”

“What?” Noah interrupted quietly. “You’ll attack me?”

“If I have to.”

Noah gave a slow nod. “I expected that answer.”

The temperature in the room seemed to rise another several degrees.

Lydia whimpered. They’re going to fight.

I won't let them. I forced air into my lungs. "Enough!" My voice cracked through the room. Three heads turned toward me.

I wrapped my arms around myself, trembling violently. "I can't..." Another dizzy spell hit. The room Dark spots clouded my vision.

I heard Damon curse. "This isn't normal." He immediately pulled out his phone. "Justin." His voice was chipped. "I need the pack healer."

He listened for barely a second. "No." His expression hardened. "I need Elder Miriam. Bring her now."

He ended the call.

I frowned weakly. "Elder Miriam?"

"The oldest healer in Silvermoon," Damon replied. "If anyone understands ancient wolf powers... it's her."

My breathing became shallow. "Lydia, please stop this..."

I'm trying. Her voice was fading. The land's power... it's overwhelming me....

I had never heard my wolf sound so exhausted. Fear tightened around my chest.

"What if..." I struggled to finish the sentence. "What if this doesn't stop?"

Damon looked directly at me. "It will." Though I noticed he never said he believed it.

The next twenty minutes felt endless. Nobody sat down, nobody relaxed. Noah remained on my left. Damon stayed on my right. Ryder stood directly across from us.

Every time one of them shifted even slightly closer to me... the other two immediately tensed. It would have been almost amusing, if I hadn't felt like I was burning alive.

The scent around me continued to thicken.

A knock interrupted the tense silence in the room. Justin opened the door. An elderly woman entered, her silver hair braided neatly down her back.

Despite her age, her emerald eyes were sharp and filled with authority.

She took one step into the room. Then stopped. Her eyes widened. "My Goddess..." She stared directly at me. "This is not ordinary."

Damon moved immediately. "Elder Miriam."

She raised one hand. "Keep calm, Alpha Damon." She slowly approached me, her nose twitching as she caught my scent.

Then she closed her eyes. "I need everyone except the patient to step back."

Nobody moved.

Her gaze shifted to the three Alphas. "I said... step back."

After a tense moment, they obeyed. Barely.

She rested two fingers against my wrist. Her expression gradually became grave. "When do you begin?"

"The dizziness and heat began just now, but my wolf has been unstable for weeks."

*25 Punts

he hummed thoughtfully before opening a leather cases duktstinarad carried in. Inside were several glass

he selected one filled with pale blue liquid. This is to suppress the symptoms only temporarily."

frowned. "Temporarily?"

he met my eyes. "We'll discuss that after Steel cleaned my arm with practiced movements. "You'll feel a ting. The needle slid beneath my skin barely noticed it.

Within seconds, cool relief spread through my body. The burning eased. My breathing steadied. The overwhelming scent surrounding me slowly faded.

Myder released a long breath. No longer tensed his shoulders. Even Damon visibly relaxed.

Mydia sighed. I feel much better now.

Myder Miriam packed away the syringe before looking at me with unmistakable concern. "You've inherited

the Sacred Land, Ms. Grayson.

she nodded.

she thought sob She pulled a cloth closer. "The land is alive. It has always been. It chooses its guardian carefully

listened silently.

The seal containing gsts ancient energy is weakening.”

ly heartbeataquickckened.What does that really mean?”

timearmorere fofits power is flowing into you every day.” She folded her hands in heelalap A Afiststy your old Walebovered the strength: But your body was never prepared to contain this much a aceiate evergy.

idia baamearery quiet.

Heleniststabbyty you’re experiencing is your body failing to keep pace with the poweret.”

frbrowned SSamy wolf is rejecting it?”

JobSiShe smiled gently. “Quite the opposite. Your wolf is embracing it it’s your abbody that’s struggling.”

Alchill ran through me. “What happens if it keeps growing?”>

Elder Miriam’s expression darkened. “The episode’s will become more frequent The pseudo-heat will interisify. Eventually...” She hesitated. “...your body will begin to break id dwww.delet

The room fell silent.

stared at her. “There has to be another way!

There is.”

Hope flickered inside me. “What is it?”

Her gaze lingered on Damon for only a heartbeat before returning to me. “You must complete the ancient balance.”

I frowned. “I don’t understand.”

“The Sacred Land recognizes both power and union.” She spoke calmly, as though reciting knowledge far older than herself.

“A guardian carrying this level of power cannot remain unanchored. You require a permanent bond strong enough to stabilize the land’s energy.”

My pulse quickened. “What kind of bond?”

Her answer came without hesitation. “A true mating.”

Silence crashed over the room.

“You must claim your mate,” Elder Miriam continued. “Once the mating bond is fully claimed, your mate’s wolf will help ground the excess energy flowing through you.”

Her voice softened. “If that bond is never completed, no matter how powerful your wolf becomes, your body will eventually fail to withstand the Sacred Land’s awakening.”

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Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 226

Noah’s POV

The moment Elder Miriam uttered the words, “You must claim your mate, I knew the clock had started. Not just for Aria, for all of us.

I’d seen this coming months ago. Long before anyone else. The Sacred Land wasn’t merely a source of ancient power. It was alive. Every report I’d gathered pointed to the same conclusion.

The guardian never inherited only the land. The land claimed the guardian in return. And now... it was claiming Aria, and Aria needed a mate to survive.

My fingers curled into a fist. The healer’s injection had calmed her scent, but only temporarily. I knew enough to recognize that. This wasn’t over. It had only begun. r

I glanced toward Damon. His eyes never left Aria.

Across the room, Ryder wore his usual relaxed expression, but only someone who understood wolves would notice how rigid his posture had become. He wanted her too.

I almost laughed. Two rivals. Neither of them was my greatest obstacle. The only person who could decide Aria’s mate... was Aria herself.

That realization should have comforted me. Instead, it made me uneasy. There was distance between us now. A wall built from my lies and the choices I’d made.

I’d approached her because of the Grayson Land. Because my pack needed it. Because my wolves were dying. Every calculation had made perfect sense.

Then she'd smiled, trusted me, believed in me. Somewhere along the way... the plan stopped being a plan. I fell in love with her.

My wolf growled softly. She's ours.

I closed my eyes briefly. No. She isn't. Not unless she chooses us.

He didn't argue. Even wolves respected that truth.

My gaze drifted toward the closed door. Another reason settled heavily in my chest. Elona. The little girl adored me. She laughed whenever I visited. She trusted me enough to fall asleep in my arms. I smiled despite myself.

Then my expression darkened. Damon could never learn the truth. If Damon discovered Elona was his own daughter... everything would change.

Aria's walls would crumble. The mate bond between them was already difficult enough for me to overcome. That truth would destroy whatever chance remained.

My eyes returned to Damon. He regretted the past. I could see it every time he looked didn't erase scars. It didn't erase betrayal, and it certainly didn't earn forgiveness.

Ryder? I barely spared him another glance. He wasn't my concern.

If there was one man standing between me and Aria... it was Damon Hawthorne. And unlike him... I wasn't planning to lose.

Ryder's POV

I watched the door close behind the healer. Silence settled over the room.

Interesting. Very interesting. Aria wasn't just powerful. She was rewriting everything I thought I knew about werewolves.

She's different, my wolf muttered.

Obviously.

I understood what he meant. When I first met Aria, I'd assumed the pull toward her was attraction. Then instinct, then obsession. Now... I wasn't so sure. Every fiber of my being screamed the same impossible

truth. Mate.

I'd experienced attraction before. Plenty of it. Women had come and gone throughout my life. No promises, no lies, no broken hearts. Everyone knew exactly what the arrangement was. Pleasure, nothing

more.

I had never offered anyone forever. Because I'd never wanted forever.

Until Aria changed everything.

My wolf paced restlessly inside my mind.

The strange part wasn't that I wanted her. It was that Damon clearly felt the same. So did Noah. Three dominant wolves. Three identical instincts.

Aria's bond with the Grayson Land had altered the nature of the mate bond itself. Her power had awakened multiple compatible bonds. Maybe... she had more than one fated mate.

The thought should have disgusted me. Instead... it irritated me. I wasn't interested in sharing. Not my business, not my territory. Certainly not the woman I loved.

Loved. The word almost made me laugh. Who would've thought? Ryder Ashford. The man who'd spent years avoiding emotional attachments was now completely ruined by one stubborn wolf.

My wolf chuckled. You're finished.

"Apparently."

My gaze shifted toward Damon, then Noah. Neither intimidated me. If they thought I'd politely step aside... they hadn't been paying attention.

Aria would choose, and I'd make damn sure she saw me for exactly who I was. Not the reckless man people assumed, but the one willing to stand beside her when everything fell apart.

I wasn't walking away. Not now, not ever.

Damon's POV

I couldn't stop looking at Aria. Even after the healer left. Even after the room emptied. She loo

Chapter 223.

exhausted.

Rhein's voice echoed inside me. Go to our mate.

I can't.

Why not?

Because I'd lost that right. The words tasted bitter.

+25 Weints?

I had spent months convincing myself Aria was my fated mate. Mine. The Moon Goddess herself had chosen us. There had never been room for doubt.

Then Noah appeared. Then Ryder. Both drawn toward her with the same unmistakable instinct.

Rhein snarled. The only reason she is also drawn to them is because of the power from the Grayson Land. You are her true fated mate.

I wanted to believe that. I closed my eyes. Memories surfaced uninvited. Aria standing alone while I questioned her. Turning my back when she needed me. Choosing to believe Claudia's lies.

Every memory was another blade twisting inside my chest.

Rhein lowered his head. We hurt her, Damon. She cried because of us. She stopped trusting us.

"I know."

The hardest battle I'd ever fought wasn't against rogues or rival Alphas. It was against my own regrets.

If I'd believed her... if I'd stood beside her... if I'd chosen her instead of doubting her... would we still be here? Would she still look at me with guarded eyes instead of love?

I didn't know. Perhaps the answer no longer mattered because the past couldn't be undone. Only the future

remained.

No matter how many rivals stood beside me... no matter how impossible the odds became... I wouldn't give up because I love her. And this time... I intended to prove it with my actions, not my words.

RYMORE!

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 227

apter 224

is POV

room felt strangely empty ty after Elder Miriam left. Only the faint scent of herbs lingered
chiththalain a inder that the injectiorosusuppressing the heat wouldn't last forever.

ton the edge ofafahebdded: staring at my hands, Claim a mate. The healer's wordslechter
through y d like a cursese.

a lay curlede opun side me, unusually quiet.

something whwhispered.

slowly harsestedener head. You already know what I'm thinking. We need to choosese
matete.

sedemeyeyes.enever wanted this.

iterveverything Damon had put me through, after Noah's deception, after Ryderer barged
into my life with snehelsess confidence, the last thing I wanted was another mate bond
compimaating everything.

kockosounded on the half-open door. Before I could answer, Damonsteteered inside Noah
followed. meRyRyder.

den Miriam had asked them to step out earlier so I could restst.

pigheds So much for privacy." None of them smiled. The atmosphererevasa safar too
heavy.

amon was the first to speak. "How are you feeling?"

letter." Physically, at least. Emotionally... that was anotherumataeter.

obody sat. The three Alphas remained standing, as thougfubnemonssciously giving one
another space, or eparing for another confrontation.

olded my arms. "If you're here to argue, don't"

lo," Damon answered immediately. "We're hererbeesewhat Elder Miriam said affects all of us.

taffects me," I corrected.

here was silence. Then Noah stepped forwarded.

ria..." His voice was gentler than usualalf the herdylw way to stabilize your power is through a completed ate bond..." He hesitated before eantmuinigig Theretet me be that mate."

he room went still.

oah met my eyes without flifictung di KrionWve giver you reasons not to trust me. I approached you with n agenda, I kept secrets. I've made mistake's."

le drew a slow breath. "But I put themst of any life making up for them i

loan placed a fist over his heart awwaon my wolf that I will never betray

Foath. It was one of theendesspoonises our kind possessed. Breaking it meant losing a wolf
looked at me. Hermeatssit

i could respond Daanoon took a step forward. "I'm making the same oath

sjaw tightened bottlesstayed silent.

r's gotdeneyes never deft mine. "I betrayed your trust once." His voice was steadyy"
regret that for it of myliffée

issorrowsepeed through our mate bond so strongly that it made my chest achee

swear room Rileein that I'll never betray you again." His Alpha aura pulsed brieflyy yyou
choose me, I'll leveryyodayproving Ideserve that choice."

blooveed his head inside the bond. Not to me, but to Lydia. We failed you onceeWee won't
again.

eenaateeds silent.

otaapped his hands once. "Well, I can't have them making dramatic speeebess without
me."

As the tension, I almost rolled my eyes. Typical Ryder. Yet when he spoke again, his usual wit disappeared.

ever taken a wolf oath.”

Damon and Noah looked at him.

ever loved anyone enough to make one.” His words scammed a trace of humor. He looked directly at my eyes. “But for you, I’d swear without hesitation

purred beneath my skin. He is so good with words isn’t he?

red her.

“I promise I’ve always lived responsibly,” Ryder admitted. “You already know I haven’t. But I can see that if I become your mate, I’ll never f— you and I’ll never abandon you.”

ize remained unwavering. “I swear it on my wolf’s life.”

Alphas, three wolf oaths, three impossible oaths.

Everyone fell silent.

ly stood. “You’ve all finished?”

dy answered. I looked at Damon first. “You hurt me more deeply than anyone ever has.” His chest stiffened.

I looked at Noah. “You approach me because you wanted something,” His expression

by Ryder. And you...” I shook my head. “You’ve spent half the time trying to cheer

The

ings

rubbed the back of his neck and admitted that.”

took a deep breath and appreciated what all of you just said. I believe your oaths

ever intended to claim another mate.” My voice came out quieter than expected. I had a hard time keeping one

mate bond between Damon and me pulsed painfully. I ignored it.

Jee Mitiaans says heeded a mate. Fine. If that's truly the only way for me to survive face that when the ecommess.

okeddabeeach of them in turn. "But I won't choose any of you

moorfrowned. "What?"

ochbeard me."

aatssearched my face. "You mean... not now?"

mean exactly what I said."

iderfalded his arms. "So all three of us are rejected?"

onnow... corrected. "Yes."

one of them spoke. I continued before anyone could interupt

Sany of you intend to use Joshua or the Silas investigaton/ponmy condition, to pressure me into coming your mate, then leave." I pointed toward the door.

won't be cornered or manipulated, and i won't choose someone because I'm desperate."

le room remained painfully quiet. Finally, Damon totulokehbe silence.

wasn't helping you because I expected anything grimeretur Hisoice was calm. "I'll continue helping hether you choose me or never choose mee."

>ah nodded immediately. Our agreementteregatdig Joshua still stands. I gave you my word. My feelings on't change that."

der shrugged. "I didn't risk getting grivotive with Claudia because I expected a reward." He smiled intly. "I'm staying, whether you pick keepnapt."

Nief loosened something triside my chest.

dia sighed. Perhaps there is hoppédorithena after all.

efore I could answer

Monimy!" A small voice ecsheed hom the hallway. The next second, Elona came

er little face was filed with voorry.

+

She climbed onto the bed beside me without hesitation and cupped my cheeks with both tiny hands. “Are -you sick?”

My heart melted instantly. I smiled despite everything. “I’m feeling much better.”

She studied my face carefully, as though deciding whether to believe me. Then her gaze shifted toward the three men standing nearby. Her little brows furrowed. “I heard what everyone said.”

Every adult in the room froze.

My eyes widened. “You... heard?”

She nodded innocently. I opened my mouth. No words came out.

She looked at Damon, then Noah, then Ryder. Her tiny expression became unusually serious. “I’ll help you, Mommy.”

I blinked. “Help me?”

She nodded vigorously. “I’ll help you choose a mate.”

The room fell into stunned silence.

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 228

Aria’s POV

+20 Post

Iff someone had told me a month ago that my biggest problem would be three Alpha-level men competing for my daughter’s approval, I would have laughed in their face.

Now? I wasn’t laughing. I was exhausted. Completely, utterly exhausted.

After Elona announced yesterday that she wanted to help me choose a mate, all three men had agreed before I even had the chance to object.

I could only roll my eyes and shake my head as I watched each of them desperately trying to win her over. She had declared that they would each have a few days to prove they deserved her mother.

After that, she would make her decision.

“Mommy.” Elona stood in front of me after breakfast with her hands tucked behind her back, wearing an expression far too serious for a little girl. “I have something important to do today.”

I narrowed my eyes. “Should I be worried?”

She shook her head so vigorously that her curls bounced around her face. “No.”

That single word only made me more suspicious.

She’s plotting something, Lydia muttered.

She definitely was.

Unfortunately, neither of us had any idea just how serious her little plot would become.

Damon arrived at my apartment just after ten that morning. His black SUV rolled into the courtyard, and the moment Elona spotted it through the window, she let out a dramatic gasp.

“Contestant Number One is here!”

I blinked. “What?”

With her hands over her mouth, her eyes widening innocently.

She looked at me on her.

At her full height, smiling in a way I rarely saw

“I wasn’t sure which you’d like.”

She immediately dug through them. There was a stuffed wolf, a painting set, storybooks, a remote-controlled helicopter, and beautiful dresses.

Damon spent the rest of the morning helping Elona load the helicopter around the garden. Every time it crashed, he fixed it.

Every time she laughed, his eyes softened as he watched her from the porch, pretending to read documents.

By lunchtime, Noah appeared. He walked into the kitchen as though he belonged there.

"I made some soup for you and Elona.

stared. "You... what?"

He held up a food container. I know you've been skipping meals due to the recent happenings.

"I have not. I've been busy, but still eating

"That's a lie, Aria, and you know what Noah was already unpacking food onto the dining table Elona mumbled onto a chair.

"Uncle Noah!"

He smiled immediately. My princess.

"I helped Mommy eat food yesterday, and I will help her again today."

"I'm proud of you

The two of them hugged the Traitors. Noah looked toward me.

"Sit, Aria."

sighed dramatically. "Both of you are bullying me."

Noah giggled. "We're loving you."

That completely destroyed any argument I had. I sat. Lynch somehow turned the conversation. The kindness that slipped into your heart before you realized it

that afternoon brought Ryder. He arrived carrying absolutely nothing. He was stilled.

Ryder?"

Her eyes lit up. Within minutes, he had transformed the backyard into a maze of clues using tree branches,

flower pots, and garden benches.

Every clue led to another. Every solved puzzle area theirs. Soon, even I was laughing as Elona ordered Ryder around like a tiny boss.

Whenever she won, she puffed out her little chest so proudly. Yes, you have been defeated. I am smarter.”

“You absolutely are.”

Lydia chuckled. He’s clever. He knew she was more than presents.

By sunset, Elona was flushed with excitement. “Kwon!”

Ryder bowed dramatically, “The champion has spoken.

That evening, I found Elona sitting cross-legged on her bed. She was writing furiously inside a pink notebook decorated with little stars.

I frowned. “What are you doing?”

She jumped. “Nothing” She tried to hide it behind her back. It was too late. I gently took the notebook. The first page read: Operation Pokaa Wate for Mommy.

I froze. “What...”

The next page nearly made me choke.

Contestant One: Mr. Damon. Very handsome. Good with helicopters. Bought many presents. Sometimes stares at Mommy.

Needs improvement. Smile more.

I turned another page.

Contestant Two: Uncle/Noah. Makes soup. Makes Mommy eat. Very reliable. Always nice.
I turned another page.

Contestant Three: Ryder. Very funny. Best treasure hunts. Can run fast. Laughs loudly.

I sat up. Elona smiled nervously. “I made scorecards.”

“Scorecards?”

“I have to choose the best husband for Mommy.”

Working so hard I could barely hear my own

thoughts about this much independence.

weetheart..." I didn't know whether to laugh or cry. "You can't choose a husband for me."
hy?"

cause.." I completely failed to think of a convincing answer.

She folded her tiny arms. "You need someone Mommy, so you won't be lonely."

My chest tightened. I knelt before her. "I already have you."

But it won't always be little."

Her innocent words hit me harder than anything she should have. She wrapped her little arms around my neck. "I don't want anybody to love you."

My eyes stung. I hugged her tightly. "I know, baby. I kissed her forehead. "And thank you."

When I finally handed the notebook back, I didn't stop her. Maybe because she was only a child, or maybe because I still didn't know what my own heart wanted.

While the rest of the world focused on romance, mine remained fixed elsewhere. It was fixed on the dark web, on every lead, every encrypted file, every hidden account, and every rumor.

The medication she gave me kept the unstable energy inside me under control. The violence less often now.

But she remained distant. "The medicine is taking a toll on me," she complained.

So I kept trying to control.

But she still didn't like it.

Then I needed a clear mind. Finding Joshua and bringing him home mattered more than anything else.

Comments

LUCK DRAWS>

Volote

Loharte 220

Chapter 226

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 229

fia's POV

ree days later, my phone rang. The catheteDatade me stand so quickly my chair nearly toppled over t as from the rehabilitation center Musse quickened.

liss Grayson,” the doctor said, dinable to hide the excitement in his voice. “Your father’s condition hass iproved significantly.

topped breathing. “What?”?

is cognitive function has recevere dhfar beyond our expectations.”

le room spun. “Dadd

le think you should visisit

I be or my waydy

ss than an hourateter, was walking through the familiar corridors of the care facility. MVheeatbeat

undered in my earsrs.

le nurses e pereeted the door quietly. “He woke up about twenty minutes ago

odded herewalked inside.

Watheres as anyonthe window. His face looked thinner, but his eyes were clearer thanadid’d seemin/weeks.

aded?”

sisemad tumed slowly. Those familiar gray eyes landed on me. Recognition fasished across his face. For megértactesecond, hope exploded inside me.

adhd dapoyourecognize me?”

dispips trembled “Aria...”

Fears burned my eyes. “You do.”

He stared directly at me. Then his entire expression changed as his pupils dilated. His breathing became frantic. His wolf scent exploded into the room.

My heart instantly rose inside me. Something's wrong.

My father's face drained of all color. His eyes locked onto mine.

"No," he whispered hoarsely. "No..."

Dad, what is it?"

His body began shaking violently, "You found
found what?"

Chapter The

"Lean forward and feel your aura, Aria. His voice was urgent. You have to stop.

"Dad, I don't understand."

He grabbed my wrist with surprising strength. His fingers dug painfully into my skin. His terrified eyes bored into mine. "Don't investigate that land anymore."

"What?"

"Do you hear me?" His voice became a desperate shout. "Stop looking into that land! If you continue..." Pure fear consumed his face. "You will die."

The words struck like an empty, searing blow. My heartbeat stopped.

"Dad!" I caught myself before I could fall out of the chair. His entire body shook violently, his breathing coming in ragged gasps.

The panic that had burned so brightly in his eyes only moments ago slowly faded, replaced by the familiar vacant gaze he wore when he wanted to hate.

"No," he grabbed my shoulders. "Dad, stay with me. Please."

He blinked, as though he didn't recognize me. "Who are you?"

My heart thudded. "Dad?"

He looked past me, confused. "Where am I?"

Theodiarity was gone. Just like that. It was as if someone had blown out the only candle in a dark room. “No!” occupied his face. “Look at me. You knew who was a few seconds ago. You were talking to me.” His eyes wandered around the room aimlessly. “I’m tired...” His head slumped forward.

“Dad!”

pressed the emergency call button beside his bed. Within seconds, nurses rushed into the room. What happened?” one of them asked.

“He was lucid,” I said quickly. “He recognized me. He spoke clearly. Then suddenly...” I shook my head. “It was like someone flipped a switch.”

I pulled out my phone with trembling hands and made two calls. The first was to the healer who had examined me a few days ago.

The second was to Noah.

I told them both to come immediately.

They arrived only minutes apart, the healer reaching the room first, with Noah fo

“I’ll examine him first,” the healer said, already moving toward my father’s bed. Noah gave a single nod and remained silent.

-hind.

WHY 2..C

I quickly explained what had happened repeating every word my father had managed to say before he slipped back into unconsciousness,

The healer listened without interrupting. When I finished, she placed both palms gently against my father’s temples.

Golden healing energy flowed from her hands, surrounding his head in a soft glow

At first, her expression remained calm. Then her brows slowly furrowed. The light around her fingertips flickered.

“What is it?” I asked, my pulse quickening.

She didn’t answer. Instead, she closed her eyes, pouring more healing energy into him as though searching for something hidden beneath the surface.

Several long moments passed before she abruptly withdrew her hands.

“...” She looked disheveled. ‘ve never encountered anything like this before.”

Every muscle in my body tensed. “What do you mean?”

There is something preventing his consciousness from fully returning. Stief footed At first, I thought it was neurological damage, but it isn’t.”

She looked over the room. She looked at my father again before turning to me

I believe. She hesitated, as though reluctant to say the words aloud “I believe your father is under a Curse.”

The room fell deathly silent. My heart skipped.

A curse? whispered.

She nodded slowly. “I can’t be completely certain, but that’s what it is. Whatever this is, it isn’t an Unseen Something supernatural has attached itself to his consciousness.”

ward.

-ked. “I thought losing Joshua..and everything that happened to the pack...

rested at

ge, and psychological collapse.

Noah stepped closer. This wasn’t your fault”

Damon arrived less than ten minutes later. He had gotten word of what happened.

The moment he crossed the threshold, the air itself seemed to tighten. Alpha presence rolled off him in a controlled wave that made even the healer straighten.

The healer explained my father’s situation to him.

His eyes found mine first, sharp and searching, then locked on Noah.

“You,” Damon said, his voice low and dangerous. “You did this.”

Noah’s jaw flexed. “I didn’t.”

“After everything you have done because of that land, don’t you see how you are the prime suspect?”

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 230

Aria's POV

Damon's wolf was close to the surface. I could scent Rhein's fury beneath the words.

"it's beyond me," Noah answered evenly. "I would never go that far."

The healer interrupted. "This is an old curse. It was cast around twenty years ago. Possibly longer. The weave is so deeply seated it had to have been placed when the mind was still young and open. Breaking it by force would shatter what's left of him."

Twenty years. Who could have done this to my father? The thought sat in my stomach like cold lead.

Damon's gaze never left Noah. "Swear it. On your wolf."

Noah didn't flinch. "I swear on my wolf I had no hand in this curse."

The silence that followed was thick enough to choke on. Damon's shoulders stayed rigid, but he didn't press further.

Later that day, after Ryder heard what had happened, he arrived at my father's rehabilitation facility. "I brought someone."

I looked toward the elderly man beside him. His silver hair reached his shoulders. His sharp amber eyes missed nothing.

Despite his age, his wolf aura was immense.

Ryder introduced him respectfully. "This is Elder Devin."

The old wolf inclined his head. "I've dealt with curses for most of my life."

Hope stirred cautiously inside me. "You can help?"

"I can try."

He approached my father's bed. The room fell completely silent. Devin placed one weathered hand over my father's forehead.

He didn't move again for several long minutes. His breathing slowed. His wolf aura spread invisibly through the room.

Even Lydia instinctively lowered her head. He's very powerful.

Finally, Devin withdrew his hand. His face had become unusually serious.

"What is it?" I asked.

"This curse..." He looked troubled. "Wasn't forced."

I frowned. "What?"

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was accepted."

Nobody spoke. He continued quietly. "A curse of this depth cannot simply be placed upon someone." He looked directly at me. "The victim had to lower every defense."

My pulse quickened.

His next words echoed through the room. "The one who cast this curse..." He paused. "Was someone your father loved with all his heart."

There was heavy, oppressive silence.

"They were family," Devin continued. "Or a lifelong mate. Someone so precious that your father's wolf never viewed them as a threat."

Lydia whimpered. Someone he welcomed. Someone he never would've fought.

My thoughts spiraled. Who? Who had been close enough? Who had earned that kind of trust? Faces flashed through my mind. Old pack elders, family friends, people from my childhood. None of them fit.

Then one face surfaced.

My mother.

I went completely still.

Lydia sucked in a sharp breath. Aria...

"No..." The whisper escaped before I could stop it. It couldn't be. Could it?

It didn't make sense, but if what Devin said was true, if only someone my father loved beyond all doubt could have placed this curse, then it might be my mother.

I couldn't sleep. Every time I closed my eyes, I saw my father's terrified face.

"Stop investigating that land. If you continue, you'll die."

Then Devin's voice would follow. "The one who cursed him had to be someone he loved most."

My mother. The possibility alone felt like poison.

Why would my mother do this? She loved my father.

Unless something had changed or someone had forced her hand.

"There has to be another explanation."

Lydia nodded slowly. Keep searching, Aria. Truth always leaves tracks.

"I'll find out how this happened." I took a deep breath, determined. "I don't care how long it takes."

The following morning, Noah asked me to come to his secret safehouse. He had found something. He typed several commands on his computer. The largest monitor lit up with dozens of moving m

I frowned. "What am I looking at?"

Lali

Nault's raw worked. "Aria..."He tried to reach for me, and I instinctively moved back.

The mate bond was supposed to be the greatest gift a wolf could receive. A connection beyond reason. A promise written into our souls before we were even born.

Burt after finding out yesterday that the person my father trusted most had been the one who cursed him, I dared yet again that I didn't want anything to do with it.

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 231

Aria's POV

Noah's words echoed in my head long after I left his secret safehouse. "Without a mate soothing your wolf, the energy will keep tearing you from the inside."

I closed my eyes. Lydia shifted uneasily. He is right.

I hated that she was.

The mate bond isn't the enemy.

I opened my eyes. "Isn't it?"

Lydia went quiet. She knew exactly what I meant. My father had trusted his mate. He had loved her. And now he couldn't even tell me the truth because of what she had done.

How could I willingly place my life in someone's hands after seeing that? How could I allow another person to have that kind of power over me?

Lydia sighed. This is hard.

I know, but until I find a better way, I'll keep taking the medication to suppress the energy.

I decided to meet with Devin to see if he knew a better way. I told him about my predicament. When I was done, he spoke.

"The medication only suppresses the symptoms." He stepped closer. "If we repair the seal on the land, the pressure on your wolf will decrease."

Hope flickered. "So I won't need..." I stopped myself. I didn't say the words. A mate.

Devin understood anyway. "You have made your decision."

I nodded. "I won't use the mate bond as a solution."

His expression remained neutral. "You need to understand something, Aria."

"What?"

"The mate bond is not a weakness."

I looked away "Maybe not

"Why don't you want to use it?" he asked

I swallowed. "I can't risk giving someone that much control over me"

For a moment, Devin said nothing. Then he simply nodded. “I understand

That evening, I found Elona sitting on the living room floor with her notebook again

I immediately pointed at it. “Don’t do this anymore

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She quickly covered it. “What do you mean, Mommy?”

“No more mate selection.”

Her eyes widened. “But Mommy...”

“No.” I sat beside her. “Sweetheart, you don’t need to find someone for me.”

“But you need a mate.”

I sighed. “Not everyone needs one.”

She tilted her head. “But Uncle Noah said wolves are happier with their mates.”

My expression tightened. Of course he did.

I glanced at her. “Your Uncle Noah talks too much.”

She giggled. “Uncle Damon talks about it too.”

That made me pause. “Damon?”

She nodded. “He said Alphas need someone who understands them.”

My chest tightened. I looked away. Why did every conversation somehow return to this?

“Elona.”

She became serious. “Did I do something wrong?”

The question immediately softened me. “No.” I pulled her onto my lap. “You didn’t do anything wrong.”

“Then why can’t I help?”

I brushed her hair back. “Because love isn’t something you choose for someone else.”

“But I love you, and I want someone to love you too.”

My throat tightened. Her innocence made everything harder. “Nalready have people who love me

She smiled “Like Mr. Damon, Uncle Noah, and Mr. Ryder?”

I couldn’t stop the small laugh that escaped

Lydia chuckled She is definitely your daughter

Unfortunately

I thought ending the game would make things easier It didn’t Because Damon didn’t stop. He never pressured me, never asked about the mate bond He simply kept showing up for Elona

At first, I thought it was another strategy Another attempt to get closer to me But slowly, I realized something. He wasn’t pretending Damon genuinely enjoyed being around her

One afternoon, I found them outside. Damon was teaching Elona how to throw a small wooden dagger. It was a practice weapon, nothing dangerous.

Chapter 228-.

“Keep your feet steady.”

Elona frowned. “I am steady.”

“No, you aren’t. You are wobbling.”

“No, I’m not.” She looked offended. Then she immediately corrected her stance.

Damon smiled. “There you go.”

She threw. The dagger hit the target. Not perfectly, but close.

“I did it!”

Damon lifted her into his arms. “You did.”

Her laughter filled the garden. I stood frozen, watching both of them. Something inside my chest twisted. The bond between them looked natural.

Lydia whispered. He loves her.

I swallowed. “Don’t start.”

You know it's true.

I looked away. I had spent so long convincing myself that keeping Damon away from Elona was protection. But was it? Or was I punishing him because I was afraid?

The thought of how easily Damon and Elona fit together haunted me for days. I hated it. It wasn't because Damon was doing anything wrong, and it wasn't because Elona was unhappy.

It was because they were happy, and somehow, that was harder to fight.

If Damon had been arrogant, demanding, or tried to force his way into our lives, I would have known what to do. I would have pushed him away. I would have reminded myself why distance was safer.

You like seeing them together, Lydia's voice came quietly.

I frowned. No, I don't.

You do You smile when she laughs with him.

I looked away That was the problem I did. Because Elona deserved happiness, and Damon deserved to know what it felt like to have a family

The thought scared me. Because what happened when the truth came out? What happened when he learned I had kept his daughter from him?

The invitation came from Walter Hawthorne, Damon's grandfather He asked me to come and visit him

with Elona.

When Damon first told me, I almost refused.

"I don't think it's a good idea."

Damon looked at me across the table. "Why?"

Comments

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 232

I glanced toward Elona, who was coloring beside us. “Because your family and Claudia...” I paused.

His eyes softened slightly. “My family is not Claudia. They pose no threat or danger to you, Aria. My grandfather loves you.”

I looked back at him. “I know he does. Claudia has a close relationship with your family. I do not want to put my child in harm’s way.”

Damon’s voice softened. “Claudia doesn’t come to our house anymore. Whatever ties she had with my mother and sister, I believe they have been severed.”

I looked at him, then at Elona. She was watching us, very obviously.

I narrowed my eyes. “What is it?”

She immediately looked away. “Nothing, Mommy.”

I sighed. She was terrible at pretending.

Lydia laughed. She learned from you. That is exactly what you do.

I ignored my wolf. “Fine.”

Damon raised an eyebrow. “Fine?”

“I’ll go.”

A small smile appeared on his face. “Thank you.”

Soon, we arrived at Damon’s packhouse.

Walter was waiting in the main hall. The moment he saw Elona, everything changed. The intimidating former Alpha disappeared. An old grandfather replaced him

“Is this the little one?”

Elona hid slightly behind Damon I noticed. She trusted him. That small movement didn’t escape

Damon crouched beside her “Elona, this is my grandfather”

She peeked around him “Hello”

Walter smiled. “Hello, little wolf

Her eyes widened. “You know I’m a wolf?”

Walter chuckled. “Everyone who is a wolf can see it

She looked pleased. Within minutes, she was talking to him telling him short, simple stories

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Walter’s laughter filled the room. “She has Alpha confidence.”

Damon smiled. “She does.”

I looked between them. And for a moment, it felt normal.

Walter disappeared briefly. When he returned, he carried a small wooden box.

Elona stared. “What is that?”

“It is a gift.”

Her eyes widened. “Is it for me?”

Walter nodded. Inside the box was a delicate silver bracelet. The kind enchanted by pack healers to protect young wolves.

Elona looked at me as if waiting for approval. “Mommy?”

I nodded. “You can accept it.”

Walter carefully placed it around her wrist. “Every young wolf deserves protection.”

Elona smiled. “Thank you.”

Walter looked at Damon, then at me. His expression softened. “You have raised a remarkable child.”

My chest tightened. “Thank you, Grandpa.”

The words came easier than expected.

The moment of peace ended when Lady Duran, Damon’s mother, entered. I immediately noticed the

tension.

I couldn't forget how she had once welcomed Claudia, nor how she had always trusted her over me, her daughter-in-law. She had indirectly, and sometimes directly, caused me so much pain.

She stopped when she saw me. For a moment, neither of us spoke. Then she lowered her head."

I looked at her. "Lady Duran."

Pain flashed in her eyes. "I know I don't deserve your forgiveness after everything I have done."

I remained silent.

She continued. "I was wrong about Claudia"

My jaw tightened slightly. "Yes, you were."

She flinched. "I believed her and defended her. By doing so, I caused you turmoil time and again I am sorry. I know apologizing doesn't change what happened."

Her eyes lowered. "But I need you to know that I regret it."

I studied her. For the first time, I saw something I hadn't expected. Not pride or excuses, but guilt.

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"Laccept your apology."

Her head lifted slightly. Hope appeared. But I continued. "That doesn't mean things can go back to the way they were."

The hope faded. "I understand."

My voice remained calm. "I don't hate you, but trust takes time."

She nodded slowly. "I understand."

She looked away. Disappointment crossed her face. But I couldn't force something I didn't feel. An apology could heal a wound. It couldn't erase the scar.

Then everything changed. Lady Duran looked past me, at Elona. Her entire body froze.

I noticed immediately. Her scent changed. It spiked with shock.

“Damon...” Her voice was barely a whisper.

My instincts immediately awakened.

Lydia became alert. We need to protect Elona.

I stepped closer to Elona. “What’s wrong?”

Lady Duran didn’t answer. She looked between Damon and the child, then back at me.

I immediately knew. She suspected something. My heart started racing. No, I can’t let them find out Elona’s identity.

Damon furrowed his brow with concern. “Mother, what’s wrong?”

She blinked. Quickly composed herself. “It’s nothing.”

But it wasn’t. I knew that much. She suspected Elona was Damon’s. If she continued looking at Elona like that, someone would ask questions, questions I wasn’t ready to answer.

I moved immediately. “Elona, we’re leaving.”

She looked surprised. “Already?”

“Yes”

Damon frowned “Aria?”

I forced myself to meet his eyes “I need to go now”

I took Elona’s hand and left. As we walked away, I felt the mate bond pulling painfully between us Rhein’s presence stirred, and Lydia answered

I swallowed hard and kept moving. Every step I took away from Damon felt less like protecting my secret and more like delaying the moment it would finally break everything.

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Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 233

Damon's POV

My mother waited until Aria and Elona disappeared through the gates before she spoke. That alone told me something was wrong.

Lady Duran was not a woman who hesitated. She could face down a room full of hostile wolves without

blinking.

But now, she looked uncertain.

"Damon."

I turned toward her. "Yes?"

Her eyes moved in the direction Aria had left. "Is Elona your daughter?"

The question landed harder than I expected. For a moment, I simply stared at her. Then I shook my head. "No, she isn't."

My answer was immediate.

"Damon, you didn't even think about it."

"Because I already know the answer."

She studied my expression. "Do you?"

My jaw tightened. "I ran a DNA test."

There was silence. Her brows lifted slightly. "You did? When?"

I looked away. The memory came back. The first time I saw Elona. The strange pull I felt. The way Rhein had reacted. The way my wolf had looked at that child and whispered one impossible word.

Pup.

I had ignored it. Because wolves could be wrong. Instinct could be manipulated. Emotions could cloud judgment. So I did what any Alpha would do. I searched for facts.

"I checked a few weeks ago, and there was no match."

My mother's expression changed. It was not relief, but disappointment. "You really believe

I looked at her. "DNA doesn't lie."

"No." Her voice softened. "But people do."

The words irritated me. I folded my arms. "Elona is not my daughter

My mother looked toward the door again. "Damon... that child is like you."

I frowned. "What does that mean?"

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She smiled sadly. "I remember you at that age." I said nothing. "She possesses some of the same traits you had as a boy.

My chest tightened. Thated that I noticed those things too. I hated that every time Elona laughed, something inside me answered.

Rhein shifted. She is our pup, Damon.

I pushed him back. She isn't. We already did a test.

My mother sighed. "Even if she isn't yours..." She paused. "You cannot continue living like this."

I looked at her. "What does that mean?"

"It means you need to think about your future."

I already knew where this was going. "Mother, don't start."

"You are the Alpha of Silvermoon, Damon. You need a Luna."

My expression hardened. "I need the right Luna. I won't pick anyone else."

She looked at me carefully. "Then fight for her. Fight for Aria. Win her back. The sooner you do, the sooner she will give birth to my grandchild."

I went silent. I was surprised by her words. This was a very positive change.

But then a thought came to mind. Aria didn't want me anymore. She now looked at me as though trusting me was a risk she couldn't afford.

"I don't think she wants me.

My mother's face softened. "Damon... you shouldn't give up."

I told my mother I wouldn't give up. After she left, I went to my office.

A memory from earlier replayed in my mind. The way Aria had rushed away with Elona. She had looked like she was trying to hide the pain she was in.

Rhein let out a low growl. Something's wrong with her

He had always been connected to Lydia, even when Aria tried to suppress their bond, even when she pushed me away

I could feel echoes of her emotions through that connection Exhaustion, fear, pain. Was someth with her health?

I immediately called Justin "Bring the healer"

Within the hour, we were at Aria's house. Elona was already asleep in her room while the healer exam Aria. There was nothing I could do except wait.

Restless, I wandered through the house until I found a study with its door slightly ajar
Something compelled me to step inside.

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Iglanced around the room before my gaze settled on the desk. Without really knowing why, I pulled open one of the drawers. It was filled with neatly arranged files. I was about to close it when one document caught my attention.

Birth Records.

My breath caught. I pulled the file out and opened it. As I read through the pages, every muscle in my body

locked.

"That's impossible."

The dates. The estimated conception date. The delivery date. They all pointed to one undeniable truth. Elona had been conceived while Aria and I were still together.

Unless Aria had betrayed me 'during that time... No. I rejected the thought the instant it formed. I knew Aria. She would never have cheated on me.

Which meant...

My heart slammed against my ribs. Elona might be my daughter.

I stood there frozen as countless memories crashed into me. The first time she had called me Mr. Damon, the way she had instinctively reached for me.

The strange protectiveness I had always felt around her. The way Rhein had accepted her from the very beginning.

I had convinced myself it was because of Aria, because of the mate bond, because I wanted a family so desperately that my instincts were playing tricks on me.

But what if it had been something else? What if my wolf had recognized our child before I ever could?

She is ours, Rhein whispered.

I closed my eyes. The previous DNA test had said otherwise.

Then... the test had been wrong.

My eyes snapped open. You think someone tampered with it?

It is very possible. Someone wanted us to believe Elona wasn't ours.

But who would do that? And more importantly why?

I couldn't confront Ana Not yet. If I was wrong, I would destroy the fragile trust we had rebuild. If I was right, then I needed to know why she had hidden my own daughter from

Quietly, I collected a few strands of Elona's hair. Then I left

I chose a facility far outside the reach of the Silvermoon Pack with no pack influence, no Council connections, and no one who could manipulate the results.

I placed the samples on the laboratory counter. "Run a DNA comparison."

The technician looked up. "Father and daughter?"

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gave a single nod. "Yes."

* 25 Puits

The hours that followed were longer than any battle I had ever fought. I had faced enemies without fear, led warriors into impossible battles. None of that compared to waiting for the truth about my own child.

Finally, the technician returned. One look at his face made my pulse quicken. He wasn't smiling. He wasn't concerned. He looked... certain.

"Alpha Hawthorne."

I rose to my feet. "Tell me, what does the result say?"

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 234

Damon's POV

The technician placed the report on the desk between us. His voice was calm. "The probability of a biological father-daughter relationship is ninety-nine point nine percent."

Everything around me went silent. For several long seconds, I couldn't move, think, or even breathe.

Our pup, she's our pup, Rhein whispered, his voice thick with emotion.

Heat burned behind my eyes. Elona was my daughter.

Then the grief gave way to anger, not at Elona, never at her, but at the years stolen from us, at the lie I had been forced to believe, at every birthday I had missed, every smile! hadn't seen, every tear I hadn't wiped

away.

I tightened my grip on the report until the paper crumpled in my hand. Why, Aria? Why did you keep Elona's real identity a secret from me?

The question that hurt more than anything else settled heavily in my chest: Did you hide her because you didn't trust me... or because you believed I would take her away?

Aria's POV

Due to the deaths that occurred on the Grayson land, the project Damon and I had been working on came

to a halt.

I returned to the land to survey it again, hoping to uncover new leads about everything that had transpired there.

When I arrived, I realized the Council had already removed most of the physical evidence that had been there the last time I visited.

I moved deeper into the land. The Council's barrier was still active. Silver markings had been carved into different places, serving as both a warning and a reminder that this land was considered dangerous.

I crouched near the ground. It looked as though there had been a campfire there recently. I brushed my fingers over the ashes left behind. They were still warm

This wasn't from the Council members or the investias

Wolf

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discipline that kept most wolves from becoming monsters.

Some rogues were simply wolves without a home. But many were criminals, assassins, thieves, and killers. No pack would accept them. No Alpha would allow them near their lands.

They survived through violence, stealing, hunting, and murder.

Lydia spoke again. If the ashes are still warm, it means they haven't gone far.

She was right. I looked around. Why would rogues return to a place where so many of their own had died

Unless... "They weren't here because they wanted to be."

Lydia understood immediately. Someone must have sent them.

I nodded. Rogues didn't gather in groups without a reason, especially not in a place the Council had already declared a death zone.

Someone had hired them. Someone had promised them something. Money, power, or protection.

I looked toward the forest. "What were you searching for?" The question disappeared into the silence.

Hours passed. I should have left. I knew that. Even Lydia knew that. But my body had become something ignored, a machine that only mattered if it could keep moving.

The headaches had become normal. The weakness had become normal. The moments when my vision blurred had also become normal. Until today.

I was examining another set of tracks when a sharp pain suddenly tore through my head. I froze. My hand shot out and grabbed the nearest tree.

“Not now... please.”

Lydia’s voice turned urgent. Aria, it’s happening again.

“I’m okay.”

No, you’re not. We’re not okay.

My breathing became uneven. The pressure inside my chest intensified. My Alpha energy surged violently beneath my skin. The medication wasn’t enough anymore.

The land’s unstable energy, my bloodline the seal. Everything was reacting.

“No...” My knees buckled. I pressed a hand against my temple.

Not here. Not now, Aria, Lydia cautioned. We need to leave

“I need to finish this investigation.”

You need to survive first.

The pain intensified. A wave of power exploded through my body. The trees around me shook. Leaves scattered across the ground.

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My wolf pushed forward instinctively. Not fully shifting, but close.

I stumbled backward. My vision darkened. “Lydia...”

I’m trying.

The last thing I felt was her pants. Then everything went black.

The first sensation was cold, then pain, then rage. Not mine... Lydia’s.

I slowly became aware of my surroundings. My body felt heavy. My senses were distorted. But I could hear voices and growls. Many of them.

My eyes opened. The land was no longer empty. Figures surrounded me, rogue wolves. Their eyes glowed in the darkness. They had been drawn here. Drawn to the energy I released.

One of them stepped forward. A scar crossed his muzzle. “Well...” His voice was rough. “Look what we found.”

I tried to move. My body refused.

Lydia snarled inside me. Protect yourself, Aria, protect us.

I forced myself onto one knee.

The rogue smiled. “You are stronger than we expected.”

I glared at him. “Who sent you?”

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 235

Aria’s POV

At my words, the rogue wolves exchanged glances before returning their gaze to me. They ignored my question and started approaching

I immediately pulled my phone from my pocket and typed as fast as my fingers could move, calling for backup.

> I need backup at Grayson Land. There are multiple hostile rogue wolves. Please hurry.

I sent the same message to Noah, Damon, Ryder, and Justin before slipping the phone back into my pocket.

“She reeks of that power. Take her!” the largest rogue commanded.

They lunged.

The first rogue’s claws sliced toward my face. I caught his wrist, twisted, and threw him over my shoulder hard enough to crack the ground beneath him.

Another slammed into my side. A third came from behind.

Lydia surged forward. Shift, Aria! I need to take over.

My bones snapped. Power exploded through my veins. My body dropped onto all fours as silver-white fur burst across my skin. The transformation finished in seconds.

The world sharpened. Every heartbeat became louder, every scent became stronger.

I threw back my head and howled. The howl echoed through the forest. Several rogues hesitated. Then they attacked together.

I launched myself into them. One wolf tried biting my neck. I twisted midair, slammed him into a tree, then kicked another so hard he rolled across the clearing.

We're stronger. Lydia sounded almost surprised. Much stronger. It has to be the power from this land

She was right. Everything felt lighter and faster. Every muscle answered instantly. Every strike landed with terrifying force.

A rogue nearly twice my size rushed me. I ducked beneath him before driving my shoulder into his ribs.

He crashed into three others. Another leaped from above I spun, catching him with my hind legs before sending him tumbling through a fallen log.

The remaining rogues froze. Heavy breathing filled the clearing None of us moved.

The first rogue slowly shifted back into human form. The others followed. Seeing them stop, I shifted as well. My clothes reformed with the magic woven into them, although several tears now marked the fabric.

"Why are you all here? Who sent you?" I growled

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The rogue leader rubbed blood from his mouth. "We were not sent here by anyone." His eyes narrowed. "We didn't come here to hunt you."

"Then why are you here?","

He looked around cautiously before answering. "We were following the call."

"What call?"

"The land."

I frowned. "What are you talking about?"

He slowly knelt and pressed his palm against the ground. "This place." His voice became almost reverent. "It eases our pain."

My heartbeat slowed. "Your pain?"

"The emptiness we feel." The rogue laughed bitterly. "You've never been a rogue. You don't know what it feels like when no pack wants you."

His voice cracked slightly. "Our wolves never sleep. They're always restless. They howl all night, they whisper, they tell us we're unwanted. They tell us to become monsters."

Around him, several rogues lowered their heads. One quietly spoke, "Sometimes... we can't even remember our own names."

Another whispered, "My wolf stopped speaking months ago."

Lydia whimpered softly inside me. Poor souls...

I swallowed. I'd read about rogue madness. But hearing them describe it... that was different.

The leader continued. "We found this place a long time ago. The moment we stepped onto this land..." His eyes lifted to mine. "The voices stopped."

My breath caught. "The land calmed your wolves?"

He nodded. "It doesn't cure us. But it gives us peace. We finally sleep. It reminds us what belonging feels like."

Lydia's sadness flowed into me. That's a blessing... this land truly heals wolves.

"But our people began disappearing," another rogue suddenly said

I frowned. I already understood what they meant. The rogues who came here and died. The rogues who were part of the sacrifice.

"They came here. They never returned We searched everywhere" He pointed directly at me. "Then we were drawn here by your power. We thought you were the one killing them"

I stared at him. "I had nothing to do with your missing packmates."

The clearing fell silent.

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The rogue leader studied my face for several long seconds. “You aren’t lying.”

“No, I am not. I want answers too. I want to know why those rogue wolves died.”

His shoulders slowly relaxed. “If you’re not our enemy... then someone else is.”

I nodded. “You are right. Tell me everything you know.”

Just as he opened his mouth to speak, several heavy footsteps approached, surrounding us from every

corner.

The wind shifted. A new familiar scent drifted into the clearing. My blood turned cold.

“Claudia.”

She stepped from the shadows wearing black tactical gear instead of one of her elegant dresses. A slow smile curved her lips. “I finally found you in the right place, away from prying eyes, Aria.”

Nearly thirty wolves had surrounded us with military precision. Unlike the rogues, these weren’t desperate. They moved like trained mercenaries.

Every one of them wore identical metal cuffs connected by strange black restraints running across their forearms and shoulders. Some carried compact launchers. Others held long metallic staffs engraved with glowing runes.

Lydia growled. Those aren’t ordinary weapons.

One of the mercenaries loaded a thick metal collar into a launcher.

Claudia smiled wider. “I wouldn’t shift if I were you, Aria.”

I narrowed my eyes. “What are those?”

“They are bloodline suppression restraints.” She sounded almost proud. “They seal inherited wolf abilities. They weaken even Alpha blood.” She tilted her head. “And if necessary, they can even interfere with a mate bond.”

Lydia snarled violently. That’s impossible!

“I don’t believe you.”

“You don’t have to.” Claudia lifted one elegant finger. “Capture her. I want her alive.”

The mercenaries moved as one.

The rogue leader stepped in front of me without hesitation. His eyes flashed gold. “Anyone who wants to get to her will have to go through me first”

Another rogue bared his teeth. “That’s right, we will protect her. She will help us find the answers we need.”

Within seconds, every rogue shifted. They stood shoulder to shoulder between me and Claudia’s soldiers.

i blinked. “You’ll fight for me?”

The rogue leader looked back only briefly. “You care about our people. That’s more kindness than this

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world has ever shown rogues.” He lowered himself into an attack stance. “Right now... we repay it.”

Claudia’s smile disappeared. “Kill the rogues that resist first and capture her alive!”

Vote

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Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 236

Aria’s POV

The forest exploded into chaos. Mercenary wolves collided with rogues in a storm of claws, snapping jaws, and flying dirt.

Trees shuddered as bodies slammed into them. Growls and agonized howls echoed across the sacrifice grounds.

I didn’t have time to watch.

Three mercenaries rushed me at once. The strange black restraints strapped to their arms glowed with

crimson runes.

“Target acquired!”

“Fire!”

A metallic collar shot toward me. I threw myself sideways. The collar struck a tree instead. The instant it wrapped around the trunk, the bark blackened as though the device itself drained the life from whatever it

touched.

My heart skipped. If that thing hits us...

Don't let it, Lydia snarled.

Another mercenary swung one of the rune-covered staffs. I caught it before it reached my shoulder, twisted hard, and drove my knee into his ribs.

He flew backward. Another appeared behind me. I spun, my elbow smashing into his jaw. He stumbled just long enough for me to kick the restraint launcher from his hands. It clattered across the clearing.

“She's stronger than we were told!”

The words barely reached me. Something was changing. I could feel it. Not outside me, but inside.

My heartbeat slowed. Then it deepened. Boom. Boom. Boom. Each beat seemed to travel into the earth itself.

The ground answered. A low vibration spread beneath my feet.

The sacrifice grounds... were alive.

Aria... Lydia's voice trembled. Do you feel it?

“I do.”

The earth wasn't simply responding. It was speaking Silver light seeped through the cracks in the ground, flowing beneath layers of stone like glowing rivers.

The altar. I suddenly knew exactly where it was. I could feel it. It existed beneath every step I took.

A blinding pulse erupted inside my chest. Pain shot through every vein. I cried out as silver markings

spread across my arms like flowing moonlight.

The air around me distorted. Every wolf stopped moving. Even Claudia stared.

“What... what is she?” one of her mercenaries took an uneasy step backward.

Lydia rose inside me, and we stood as one.

Open your eyes, she whispered.

“I already have.”

Not those eyes.

The world changed. Everything became... clear. The trees no longer blocked my vision. The earth became transparent beneath my feet. Countless streams of energy flowed through the sacrifice grounds like veins inside a living body.

At the very center... there was an altar. Its silver symbols pulsed with the exact rhythm of my own heartbeat.

A gasp escaped me.

I heard Claudia’s voice from behind as she commanded, “Capture her!”

The mercenaries charged again. This time... the ground trembled. Silver light erupted beneath their feet. Roots burst from the earth like living chains, wrapping around several mercenaries before hurling them backward.

The rogues stared in disbelief.

“How can this be? Even the land protects her...” One rogue slowly whispered, “Is she the Guardian?”

Another mercenary lunged. Without thinking, I reached toward him. Before he could strike, I sidestepped effortlessly and hit the exact point where his shoulder met his chest. He collapsed instantly.

Another came, then another. Every attack felt... predictable. As though their bodies told me exactly what they would do before they moved.

Lydia laughed. You can feel them. Every heartbeat, every pulse, every intention.

I moved through the battlefield like flowing water. No wasted motion, no hesitation.

A mercenary raised another suppression launcher. Before he could fire, the earth beneath him buckled violently. He lost his footing. A rogue crashed into him from the side.

Nearby, the rogue leader roared as he tore another mercenary off one of his companions. He glanced toward me. "We've got your back!"

"Don't kill them!" I shouted.

He blinked. "They're trying to capture you!"

"I know." I ducked beneath another attack before driving my fist into a mercenary's stomach. He doubled over, gasping. "I need answers!"

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Another restraint collar flew toward me. I caught it. Its runes flared violently against my skin. Pain exploded through my hand. I gritted my teeth and hurled it into the distance. It exploded against a boulder.

My gaze found Claudia again. She was retreating.

"Running already?"

She smirked. "I've already learned everything I came for."

My stomach tightened. "What does that mean?"

She didn't answer. Instead, she pressed something on a communicator attached to her wrist. "Fall back, everyone."

The mercenaries immediately began retreating with precision. The rogues tried to pursue.

"Stop!" I shouted.

The rogue leader looked confused. "They're escaping!"

"Let them."

He reluctantly called his wolves back.

I walked toward Claudia. She remained just beyond striking distance. Her smile returned. "You've exceeded every expectation, Aria."

"What do you know about this place?"

She chuckled softly. “Far more than you.”

“What happened to the wolves who disappeared?”

There was silence.

“What happened to Joshua?”

For the first time... her smile faded. Only for a second, but i saw it

“You keep asking the wrong questions.”

Angry, I shifted into my wolf and charged at her. Before I could reach her, thick smoke bombs burst around her. We were surrounded by a wall of gray. I felt something pierce my skin. I had been hit by one of the suppressors they came with.

“Damn it!”

The rage inside me surged. I reached for the power again. The silver light around my body flared once...

twice... then vanished.

Every ounce of strength disappeared from my limbs. The connection to the land snapped so abruptly it felt as though part of my soul had been ripped away.

“Lydia...”

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I’m here... Her voice sounded weak.

My knees buckled. The world spun violently. The silver markings faded from my skin. My wolf form collapsed. Bones shifted painfully as I reverted completely to human form.

Cold rushed over my sweat soaked body. Every muscle trembled uncontrollably. I could barely breathe.

What... happened to us? I whispered.

Lydia’s breathing was just as ragged as mine. I don’t know. She paused, exhausted. I think we have finally been suppressed.

Darkness crept into the edges of my vision. The last thing I saw before everything blurred was the rogue leader rushing forward to catch me before I hit the ground.

Vote

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Aria's POV

The first thing I felt was cold. The second was weakness, not ordinary exhaustion. This felt as though every drop of strength had been drained from my bones, leaving nothing behind.

I tried to move my fingers. Nothing.

Lydia? I called.

I was met with silence.

Panic clawed at my chest. Lydia!

A faint whimper answered. I'm here... I just... can't... Even her voice sounded distant. My wolf had never sounded so weak.

I forced my eyes open. The silver glow covering the clearing had vanished. The ground beneath me looked ordinary again, as though the miracle I'd witnessed moments ago had never happened.

Then reality hit me. I wasn't wearing anything. The magic woven into my clothes had failed when my strength collapsed, leaving me completely exposed.

I instinctively folded my arms across my chest, but even that simple movement made my muscles

scream.

Footsteps approached, slow and confident. I already knew who it was.

Claudia.

She stopped a few meters away, looking down at me with a victorious smile. “So...” she said softly. “You finally fell. It worked. The suppressor weakened your power.”

I glared at her. “If you’re going to kill me, stop talking and do it.”

She laughed. “Oh, Aria. If I wanted you dead, you would already be dead.” She crouched until we were almost eye level. “I need you alive.”

She looked toward her mercenaries. “Bring her.”

Immediately, half a dozen men rushed toward me carrying more suppression restraints. My body r

to obey. I tried standing. My legs buckled instantly.

Move... Lydia strained. Please... move...

“I can’t.”

One of the mercenaries reached for my wrist.

Then, an Alpha command exploded through the forest.

“GET AWAY FROM HER!”

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The roar shook the trees. Every wolf froze. My heart lurched. The familiar scent reached me.

It was Damon.

Relief hit so hard my vision blurred.

He burst through the trees like a storm. Behind him came Justin and nearly two dozen of his men. Every one of them shifted. Their united aura slammed into the clearing.

Several mercenaries instinctively stepped backward.

Damon’s eyes landed on me. For one terrible second... he stopped moving. His expression changed from murderous rage... to something painfully gentle.

Without saying a word, he stripped off his jacket and crossed the distance between us. He wrapped it around my shoulders before kneeling beside me. His hand rested lightly against my back.

“You idiot,” he murmured, his voice trembling with restrained anger. “Why do you always wait until you’re dying before asking for help?”

His Alpha aura expanded around me. It was warm, steady, and protective. It wrapped around my trembling body like an invisible shield. My breathing slowly evened out.

Lydia sighed. Rhein... He’s lending us his Alpha strength, she whispered weakly.

Damon looked over his shoulder. “Justin.”

“Already on it, Alpha.”

Justin drew his sword. “Everyone! Protect Luna Aria!”

Every warrior answered with a unified roar before charging into battle. The clearing erupted again. Steel clashed, claws met claws. The mercenary wolves, already exhausted from fighting the rogues, quickly lost ground.

The rogue leader staggered toward Damon, blood dripping from his shoulder. “We’ll help.”

Damon gave a single nod. “Fight beside us.”

The rogue didn’t hesitate. “You heard him!”

The surviving rogues charged back into the battle alongside Damon’s men. Watching pack wolves and rogues fight shoulder to shoulder should have felt impossible. Instead it felt right.

Claudia watched the battle for several seconds before clicking her tongue. “Tch” She spoke into a communicator. “Mission failed”

I forced myself upright. “Don’t let her escape!”

Damon moved instantly. Unfortunately Claudia was already retreating. Smoke grenades burst across the clearing. By the time the smoke dispersed... she was gone. Again.

Damon cursed under his breath. “Justin, track every possible escape route and find her.”

“Yes, Alpha.”

The remaining mercenaries were quickly subdued. Those who could still run fled.

Silence slowly returned.

I looked toward the roques. Several lay wounded on the ground. One had lost an arm. Another struggled to breathe. The rogue leader was barely standing.

Damon noticed my gaze.

“They need treatment. They fought to protect me.”

“I know.” He turned to his men. “Take every surviving rogue back to Silvermoon. They fought under my command.” Damon’s voice was calm but firm. “They’ll be treated as guests until we learn the truth.”

The rogue leader stared at him in disbelief. “You’d... shelter rogues?”

Damon met his eyes. “You protected someone important to me. That’s enough.”

The rogue lowered his head deeply. “Thank you, Alpha.”

The healer soon arrived. She spent nearly an hour examining me while Damon refused to leave the room. Finally, she stepped back with a troubled expression.

“This is worse than I feared.”

I slowly sat up. “How bad is it?”

She hesitated. “Your bloodline awakening has exceeded what your body can currently withstand.”

“I’ll recover.”

She shook her head. “Not if nothing changes.”

The room became silent.

“The land awakened your inheritance.” She looked directly at me. “But it also tied your life force to itself.”

A cold knot formed in my stomach. “What are you saying?”

“If the matter surrounding that sacred land isn’t resolved soon... your body will continue breaking down.”

Even Damon stiffened

The healer continued. “Every time you draw on that power now, the damage will worsen.”

Lydia whimpered. She speaks the truth.

“So I just stop using it?”

The healer sighed. “I don’t believe that’s possible. You are already bound to it. There is no turning back.”

Later that evening, despite everyone’s protests, I insisted on questioning the rogue wolves. I started toward the guest quarters.

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Damon caught my wrist. “Enough.”

I frowned. “They’re willing to talk.”

“And you’re barely standing.”

“I don’t have time to rest.”

“You don’t have a choice.”/

I pulled my hand away. “What if they leave and I don’t get the chance to ask them questions?”

“They won’t.” Damon’s voice became firmer.

I opened my mouth to argue. He stepped closer.

“Aria.” The warning in his voice made me stop. “I said enough.”

For a long moment, we simply stared at each other.

Finally, I sighed. “Fine.”

He looked toward the others gathered outside the room. “Justin. Take everyone outside.”

Justin immediately understood. “Yes, Alpha.”

Within seconds, the room emptied. The door closed behind them. Silence settled between us.

Damon remained standing, his back to the door. His expression was unreadable. Something was wrong.

He slowly turned to face me. “There is one question you’ve been avoiding.”

LUCK DRAW >>

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 238

Aria's POV

My pulse quickened. "Damon..."

He took another step. "When I first saw Elona, I felt she was mine, but you said she wasn't." He took another step.

"I thought maybe I only wanted to believe she was mine. But just to be sure, I did a DNA test that came out negative."

His eyes never left mine. "I didn't think anything of it until I stumbled upon some medical records in your drawer."

My stomach dropped.

"I checked the timelines." He took another step. "It was crazy how your time of pregnancy coincided with when we were together."

He stopped directly in front of me. "I decided to run a second DNA test only to find out that someone had tampered with the first result and Elona is my daughter."

I couldn't breathe. I swallowed hard. "Damon..."

He interrupted me. "Why did you lie to me?"

The question landed like a blade. Silence swallowed the room.

I lowered my eyes, unable to answer. Because after everything that had happened... I no longer knew how to defend the lie I'd spent five years protecting.

Damon's POV

The silence between us was unbearable. Aria stood only a few feet away, pale from exhaustion, my jacket hanging loosely over her shoulders.

The healer had told her to rest, yet she looked ready to go and question the rogues.

But none of that mattered right now. Only one question did. The one I asked her.

I reached into my pocket and pulled out the DNA report. I had read it so many times the words were

burned into my memory. Probability of paternity: 99.9999%.

There was no room for doubt or denial.

Elona... was my daughter.

That's right, Damon. She's our pup, Rhein whispered, his voice thick with emotion.

I clenched my hand until my knuckles turned white.

at's at your tongue, Aria? Why can't you answer my question?" I asked.

She remained quiet. Her head was lowered.

I let out a bitter laugh. "So every time I looked at her... every time I felt something I couldn't explain..... wasn't imagining it."

Blood recognizes blood, Rhein growled. It was our instinct trying to reach her.

Finally, Aria lifted her head and spoke. "I always knew this day would come." She slowly met my eyes. "There was never any point in telling you."

My chest tightened.

"No point?" My voice rose despite my efforts to stay calm. "I have a daughter, Aria. Our daughter. You don't get to decide that there's no point!"

She didn't flinch. "I already decided five years ago."

I stared at her. "You had no right."

"I had every right." Her voice remained steady. "Elona is my child."

"She's my child too!"

"No." The single word hit harder than any punch. "She's mine."

I took another step toward her. "You cannot erase me from her life."

"I already did."

Rhein roared inside my head. She can't mean that.

I searched her face desperately for hesitation or regret, but there was none. Instead... I found resolve.

“You think I’m unfit to be her father,” I said quietly.

“I know you are.”

The words punched the air from my lungs. “Why?”

Her eyes became frighteningly cold. “Because I remember everything you did to me when we were married.”

Images flashed through my mind. The accusations, the misunderstandings. My rejection of her. The pain I’d caused. Still...

“I’ve changed, Aria. You know that.”

“You changed after destroying everything. There is no coming back from what you did, Damon.”

Neither of us spoke. The room felt suffocating.

Finally, I forced myself to continue. “Do you know what hurts the most?”

She said nothing.

These past few weeks... I kept wondering why Elona liked me so much.” Despite myself, I smiled faintly. “She always found excuses to come near me. She laughed at my terrible jokes. She trusted me. She even let me carry her.”

My voice trembled. “I thought maybe... maybe fate was giving me another chance.” I laughed bitterly. “It wasn’t fate. It was blood, our blood.”

Rhein’s sadness washed through me. She felt us. That’s why she kept coming back.

I looked at Aria. “She was drawn to me because I’m her father. Whether she understood it or not, the bond was there.”

Aria’s lips curved into a faint, cold smile. One that immediately made my stomach sink.

“You really believe that’s why?”

I frowned. “What do you mean?”

She folded her arms. Her voice was almost emotionless. “Elona wasn’t unconsciously drawn to you. She already knew.”

My heartbeat quickened. My mind went blank. "What?"

"She figured it out a long time ago. She knew you were her father."

I stared at her. "No, that's impossible."

My thoughts spiraled. Elona knew? Since when? How? Why hadn't she...

Aria answered the question before I asked it. "Elona knew, and she chose not to acknowledge you."

Every word felt like another blade. "No."

"She knew exactly who you were." My breathing became uneven. "She simply chose not to call you Father."

The room spun. Rhein whimpered. No... that can't be. She can't be telling the truth.

I shook my head. "You're lying."

"I'm not."

"She smiled at me, played with me, and even trusted me." My voice cracked. "Why would she do all that if she didn't want me?"

Aria's gaze never left mine. "Because children are kinder than adults. She gave you a chance, but not as her father."

I couldn't breathe. My heart pounded painfully.

The silence became unbearable. I whispered, "Why?"

Aria answered. "She knows what you did to me."

Every muscle in my body locked.

She vows how much I suffered. She knows Job rejected us for years. She knows I almost died because "st you"

My vision blurred.

"And after hearing everything... Aria's voice softened "She made her own choice."

Rhein let out a broken howl. Our pup rejected us...

I grabbed the edge of a nearby table to steady myself. "No... It wasn't her decision."

“It was indeed her decision.”

“That’s not true. You poisoned her against me.”

Aria’s expression darkened. “I only told her the truth.”

“You told a child only one side! You made her hate me!”

“I never once told Elona to hate you.” Her voice finally rose. “I told her she was free to decide for herself, and she did.”

Those words shattered something inside me.

A sharp knock interrupted us. Neither of us responded. The door suddenly opened.

Noah walked in. The moment his eyes landed on Aria’s pale face and my broken expression, his own hardened.

“What happened?”

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 239

Damon’s POY

Aria sighed. “He knows the truth about Elona.”

Noah’s eyes narrowed. I looked at him. Every emotion I’d been holding back suddenly found a target. “You.”

He frowned. “What about me?”

I took one slow step toward him. “You knew Elona was my daughter?”

“Yes, I did.”

“Yet you helped her hide her and even pretended as though she were yours.”

“I protected them.”

“You stole five years from me!”

“I protected the people you hurt.”

Rhein snarled furiously. He's always between us. Always.

I pointed at Noah. "Every time I got close to Aria... you were there. When I tried to understand what happened... you interfered. When Elona needed a father... you stood in my place."

Noah's eyes flashed dangerously. "I stood where you abandoned them."

The words exploded inside me. I swung first. My fist crashed into Noah's jaw. He stumbled back before immediately retaliating with a punch to my ribs.

Pain shot through my side. I barely felt it.

We collided again. Punches were thrown. Neither of us shifted, but neither of us held back. Furniture splintered as Noah slammed me into the wall. I shoved him away with all my strength.

"You wanted my mate!"

He wiped blood from his mouth. "I wanted her'safe from you first."

"You bastard! You wanted my daughter too!"

"I became the father she needed because you weren't there!"

I roared and charged him again. Our fists collided almost simultaneously. The impact echoed through the

room.

"Damon!"

Aria's voice cut through my rage. Neither of us listened.

Rhein roared inside me. Make him pay for everything he has done!

All I could see was Noah: The man who had stood beside Aria. The man Elona trusted. The man who had watched my daughter grow while I hadn't even known she existed.

At that moment, grief and rage became indistinguishable, and I no longer knew which one was driving my fists.

Aria's POV

"Damon, stop!"

My voice echoed through the room, but neither Damon nor Noah heard me. Or maybe they simply didn't care. Their fists collided again with enough force to crack the wooden table between them.

Bang!

Splinters flew across the room. Noah staggered back before wiping the blood from the corner of his mouth.

Damon's breathing was ragged. His knuckles were split open, blood dripping onto the floor, but the pain seemed meaningless to him.

Damon's Alpha aura rolled through the room in violent waves. Noah answered with his own. The pressure became suffocating.

They're going to shift, Lydia warned weakly. If they do, this room won't survive.

I tried to step between them. My legs nearly gave out. The healer hadn't been exaggerating. My body was still paying the price for awakening my bloodline.

"Enough!" I shouted.

Neither man looked at me. Damon charged again. Noah met him head-on.

Just before they collided, the office door burst open.

"Stop, please!"

A small voice, clear and terrified, reached us.

Every Alpha aura in the room disappeared instantly. Both men froze.

I turned toward the doorway. Ryder stood there, one hand protectively on Elona's shoulder. His usually carefree expression had vanished.

Beside him, Elona stared at Damon and Noah with wide, frightened eyes.

"Mummy..."

Her tiny voice shattered what remained of the tension. I immediately crossed the room and knelt despite the protest from every muscle in my body.

"I'm here."

She threw herself into my arms. I hugged her tightly.

"I'm sorry." I whispered. "You shouldn't have seen that."

She buried her face against my shoulder. "Are you hurt again?"

"No. I am not, my princess."

It was a lie. She knew it. But she didn't argue. Instead, she quietly looked past me toward Damon.

He hadn't moved. His eyes were fixed entirely on Elona. There was so much longing in them that even struggled to look away.

Lydia sighed. He looks at her the way a father should look at his princess.

I closed my eyes briefly. I know. I'd always known this moment would come. I had spent years hoping it wouldn't come, yet still preparing for it in case it did. But now that it stood before me... I realized I hadn't prepared at all.

I stroked Elona's hair. "Sweetheart..."

She looked up at me.

"There is something I need to tell you."

She nodded patiently.

"Mr. Damon..." I glanced toward him before looking back at her. "He knows the truth now."

She was silent for several seconds. Then she simply asked, "You told him?"

"No. He found out himself."

She managed another nod. "I see."

I smiled sadly. "I won't decide this for you."

Her eyebrows furrowed. I gently cupped her face.

"Whether you acknowledge him... whether you call him your father... or whether you need more time... that decision belongs only to you. No one else. Not me, not him, only you."

The room became completely silent. Everyone waited. Even Damon barely seemed to breathe.

Elona slowly stepped away from me. She walked toward Damon. Each tiny step made his expression grow

more emotional.

When she finally stopped in front of him, she tilted her head exactly the way Damon always did when he was thinking. The resemblance made my chest ache.

She looked up into his eyes. “I’ve always known who you were.”

Damon swallowed hard. “I know.”

“I found out that day at the field when you carried me.” She glanced at me. “I saw how scared Mum was

when asked about my identity then,

She returned her gaze to Damon, her expression serious. “You hurt Mummy.”

“I know, and I was wrong. Damon lowered his head. “You have every right to hate me.”

She quickly shook her head. “I don’t hate you. I was disappointed.”

Those simple words hit harder than any accusation.

Damon’s shoulders trembled. “I don’t expect you to forgive me.”

“I know.” She looked back up. “But...” A small smile spread across her face. “The fact that you’re my father can’t change.”

A tear rolled down Damon’s cheek.

“So, if it’s okay with you...” She nervously clasped her hands together. “I want to call you Dad.”

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Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 240

Aria’s POV

The single word broke Damon. He dropped to one knee in front of her. Tears streamed freely down his face now.

“It’s more than okay, my child.” His voice cracked. “It’s everything.”

Elona smiled and wrapped her little arms around his neck. He hugged her carefully, as though she were the most precious thing in the world.

Lydia smiled softly inside me. She has a kind heart.

Watching them together stirred emotions I couldn’t describe. Part of me was relieved. Another part still

hurt.

Five years of pain couldn’t disappear in a single embrace. But... Elona deserved this. She deserved to bond with her father. No matter what had happened between Damon and me.

After several long minutes, Damon finally composed himself enough to stand. He kept one hand protectively on Elona’s shoulder. Then his gaze shifted toward Noah.

“I’ve made my decision.”

Noah folded his arms. “And what could that be?”

Damon’s Alpha aura subtly filled the room again. “Now that the truth is out... neither you nor Ryder has any reason to pursue Aria.”

The room instantly became tense again.

I blinked. “Excuse me?”

Damon looked at me. “I’m Elona’s father. You and I were mates.”

“Were, that’s the keyword,” I reminded him.

“The mate bond still exists, Aria.” He stepped closer. “Our daughter deserves her parents together.”

I stared at him in disbelief.

“So...” he continued calmly, “I’m the one with the greatest right to become your mate again.”

There was absolute silence as I tried to process what I had just heard. Even Noah looked momentarily stunned by Damon’s confidence.

Pure anger rushed through me. I took one step forward until we were almost chest to chest.

“The greatest right?” My voice was dangerously quiet. “Damon... do you hear yourself?”

He frowned. “I’m thinking about our family.”

“No.” I shook my head. “You’re thinking like an Alpha who believes everything belongs to him.”

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Liis expression hardened. “I’m her father, and I still love you. We are fated mates.”

“We are not fated mates. Even if we were, now I have three frates to pick from, and I choose none.”

His jaw tightened. “You can’t deny what fate intended.”

“And you can’t use fate as an excuse to make decisions for me.”

The room fell silent again!

I pointed at myself. “I am not a prize.”

I pointed toward Elona. “Our daughter is not a bargaining chip.”

Then I pointed directly at Damon. “The fact that you’re Elona’s father changes exactly one thing.”

His hopeful expression faltered.

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“You now have the chance to build a relationship with your daughter.” I took another step closer. “It does not give you ownership over me. I am my own person.”

I held Damon’s gaze without wavering. “I decide who I love. I decide who I forgive. And if the day ever comes when I decide to choose a mate, that choice will be mine. No one else’s.”

Damon opened his mouth, but no words came.

I had no intention of wasting another second arguing with Damon. I stormed out.

“They’re awake,” Ryder said quietly as he walked beside me. “The rogues you brought back are asking to speak with you.”

I nodded once. “Take me to them.”

Lydia stirred. Be careful, Aria. You still need to rest.

I will.

We went to the guest house where the rogues were being kept, There were eight of them. Most carried scars that had long since healed.

The moment I entered, every head turned toward me. Their scents hit me immediately. At first, there was fear, then it settled into a mix of weariness and relief.

The oldest wolf, with gray hair, slowly stood. “Thank you for bringing us here,” he said hoarsely.

“It was my pleasure. I’m Aria Grayson. My family owns the land where we met.”

Recognition flashed through several pairs of eyes. “The Grayson family...”

I nodded, interrupting. “I need answers.”

Silence settled over the room. I folded my arms. “What do you know about the sacrifices that go on in that land?”

The wolves exchanged uneasy glances. Finally, the gray-haired wolf sighed. “We didn’t want to tell you this

earlier, but now we believe we can trust you”

He glanced at the rest of the rogues, and they nodded as if to say he was speaking their minds.

He returned his gaze to me and continued.

“My name is Garrick.” His voice trembled slightly. “Over twenty years ago... I wasn’t a rogue.”

I frowned.

“None of us were.”

That caught my attention. “What do you mean?”

“We were all lone wolves who were hunted down by men who worked for a certain powerful wolf.”

My eyes narrowed.

“They hunted any lone wolf they saw traveling alone. Whether it was scouts, messengers, runaways, or even young warriors. They didn’t care.”

Another man beside him spoke up. “They watched borders. They knew exactly where wolves could disappear without anyone noticing. They ambushed us, chained us, and even drugged us.”

Another rogue clenched his fists. “They treated us like livestock.”

The room fell deathly quiet.

“They weren’t recruiting rogues...” I murmured. “They were creating them.”

Garrick gave me a bitter smile. “Exactly.”

Lydia’s anger surged through me. Animals.

No, I clenched my jaw. Animals don’t do this.

You are right about that. They are pure monsters.

Garrick continued. “They gathered hundreds over the years.”

“Hundreds?”

His eyes clouded. “I never counted. I stopped trying.”

A chill crawled down my spine. “What were they doing with all of you?”

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Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 241

Aria’s POV

Garrick's answer came in barely more than a whisper. "We were all living sacrifices."

The words landed like stones.

"They believed the altar demanded werewolf blood." Another rogue swallowed hard. "Not ordinary deaths. They wanted fear, pain, and despair. The stronger the wolf, the stronger the sacrifice."

Lydia snarled so violently my claws threatened to emerge. I'll tear every one of the perpetrators of this barbaric act apart when we finally get hold of them.

You might get your chance.

I looked back at Garrick. "If they captured you all, I am guessing you escaped."

His expression twisted painfully. "Yes, we did, but that was not because we won." His gaze drifted toward the floor. "The ritual we were supposed to be used for failed."

I frowned. "Failed?"

He nodded. "Something went wrong. The altar reacted. The ground even split apart, but the sacrifice did not go through. We fled without looking back."

"What happened after you escaped?" I asked.

Garrick laughed bitterly. "We went to the Werewolf Council."

My chest tightened. "They should have protected you."

"So we believed." His eyes filled with old disappointment. "We told them everything. We told them wolves were being sacrificed. We begged them to investigate."

"What did they do?" Ryder asked coldly.

"They called us liars." Another rogue spoke through gritted teeth. "They said rogues make up stories to avoid punishment."

Another slammed his fist against the table. "They imprisoned some of us, ignoring every warning."

My stomach twisted. Corruption existed in the Werewolf Council even back then.

I slowly asked, "Then what happened?"

No one answered immediately. The silence itself felt horrifying. Finally, Garrick whispered, "They disappeared."

My brows drew together. “Who?”

“The ones the Council imprisoned. They vanished with no trial. There was no release, no bodies. They were just...” He looked directly into my eyes. “Gone.”

Lydin’s coice became icy. I strongly believe Silas is the powerful wolf behind this. He is working with people In the werewolf Council!

Yes. I believe the same thing too.

Ryder cursed under his breath. “That means the Council was already compromised. We were right about them after all.”

I inhaled slowly, forcing my emotions back under control. “What have you done since then?”

The rogues exchanged embarrassed looks. “We just survived.”

“How did you survive?”

“We stole things we needed...” One shrugged helplessly. “Food, medicine, blankets... whatever kept us alive.”

Another lowered his head. “We know stealing is wrong, but starving is worse.”

I studied every face carefully. None of them smelled proud. None of them smelled bloodthirsty. All they had was regret, exhaustion, and years of running.

“Were any of you murderers?” I asked.

Every head shook. “No. We avoided killing whenever possible. We’ve spent our whole lives hiding, drifting from one place to another.”

I believed them.

Lydia believed them too. They’re telling the truth.

I know. These weren’t monsters. They were survivors. Victims who had spent decades carrying the label of criminals because no one powerful had cared enough to listen.

I looked around the room. “You’ve been running for over twenty years.” I took a slow breath. “That ends today.”

Confusion spread across their faces. “What do you mean?” Garrick asked cautiously.

I met every pair of eyes. “You don’t have to keep living like hunted animals. If you’re willing, I will take you all in as part of my family.”

Several wolves froze in shock.

“You’d... accept rogues?” someone whispered.

“I don’t see rogues.” I shook my head. “I see wolves who were abandoned.”

Tears filled the older Garrick’s eyes. “But we have nothing.”

“You don’t need anything. You’ll work and follow pack laws. You’ll protect innocent wolves, and the Silvermoon Pack...” I smiled faintly. “...will protect you.”

For several long seconds, no one moved. Then Garrick slowly dropped to one knee. One after another... every wolf in the room followed.

Chap 14.

Emotion: clogged my throat.

Thank you, Ms Grayson. We swear our loyalty to you. We swear loyalty to the Grayson family. We swear never to betray the sanctuary you’ve given us.”

Lydia lifted her head proudly. You have done the right thing, Aria. Your father will be so proud of you.

I looked at the wolves kneeling before me. “No, dori’t do this.”

They looked up in confusion.

“We didn’t build this family on kneeling.” I stepped forward. “We build it by standing together.”

One by one, they rose to their feet. I caught a different scent from them. It was not fear or despair, but hope.

For the next three days, I barely slept. I assigned Ryder, Damon, and Noah their respective tasks. Now that I had heard the rogue wolves’ testimony, I needed to expose the corrupt Council members.

That would bring me one step closer to uncovering the truth about the powerful werewolf known as Silas. And, hopefully, it would also lead me to my brother.

It was also time to bring Claudia down. We already had more than enough evidence against her.

Noah sent me server logs from the Werewolf Council, along with excavation reports he had recovered from Claudia's hidden servers.

Everything was meticulously documented, from the capture of the lone wolves twenty years ago, to the failed ritual, to the Council's deliberate refusal to investigate.

The files also detailed the imprisoned rogues who had mysteriously disappeared over the years. They even contained records of the recent sacrifices.

I circled another date with my pen. "There it is..."

Ryder leaned over my shoulder. "What did you find?"

I pointed to the documents. "Garrick said the surviving rogues sought help from the Council three days after they escaped."

I slid another report beside the first.

"This is the Council's visitor log."

His eyes widened. "They actually recorded it."

"They did. Look here."

I handed him another document.

"The committee rejected their claims less than an hour later."

Ryder frowned. "Without conducting an investigation."

"Exactly. My pulse quickened. "They already knew what had happened."

Lydia's growl echoed through me. Because they were protecting someone.

It had to be Silas.

A knock interrupted us.

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 242

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Aria's POV

Justin entered carrying another stack of files. "These are from Alpha Damon."

I accepted them. "They're the financial audits you requested."

I opened the folder. Several names immediately caught my attention. It contained the names of committee members, council investigators, and senior administrators, each receiving large deposits over several years.

Ryder let out a low whistle. "Now this is proof that they've been bought."

Silence settled over the room. Then another voice spoke from the doorway. "I've confirmed the source of the money paid into the council members' accounts."

It was Noah. He walked in carrying his laptop. Apparently, he had discovered the same thing Damon did and even took it a step further.

His face was calm as always, but I could see exhaustion beneath his eyes.

"When did you last sleep?" I asked.

He shrugged. "I don't remember."

I sighed. "You'll collapse before this is over."

"I'll sleep after Claudia goes down."

Lydia huffed. I like him. He's stubborn.

Like someone else I know? She ignored me.

Noah placed the laptop on the table. "I traced every payment." He enlarged several charts. "They all originate from businesses secretly controlled by the Silas Organization."

Ryder folded his arms. "So they weren't simply bribed."

"They were employees." Noah nodded. "For years."

A cold chill ran through me. "The corruption reached deeper than we imagined."

"Much deeper." He tapped another screen. "I've already encrypted everything. No one can alter these files

now."

I smiled faintly. “Good.”

I forwarded the evidence connecting the council members to Silas to Damon. He immediately sprang into action.

Two hours later, my phone vibrated. Noah glanced at it before handing it over. “It’s Damon.”

I answered. “What’s the progress?”

His familiar voice came through immediately. “We’ve got them.”

My grip tightened on the phone. “The Council?”

“Not all of them. But enough.” His tone carried quiet satisfaction. “My grandfather called an emergency meeting with the Council Elders.”

Walter, the former Alpha. Head of the Hawthorne family. One of the few people powerful enough to force the Council to listen.

“What happened?”

“The financial records I sent you were verified, and several committee members have already confessed.”

I exchanged a glance with Ryder. Even I hadn’t expected that. “They confessed?”

“They turned on each other the moment they realized how overwhelming the evidence was.”

A humorless smile crossed my face. “Cowards.”

Damon continued, “My family’s political allies have also stepped in. They’re demanding a complete investigation.”

I closed my eyes briefly. It was finally happening. These corrupt council members would finally answer for their crimes.

“I’ll see you at the Council,” I said.

The call ended.

Ryder exhaled. “I’ve never seen the Council move this fast.”

“They’re protecting themselves now.”

Noah nodded. "They know public opinion has already turned."

He wasn't wrong. The evidence was overwhelming. There was nowhere left to hide.

The emergency Council session lasted almost six hours. The cases of the corrupt council members and Claudia were judged together.

Every piece of evidence appeared on the massive screens surrounding the chamber. The testimonies, the financial records, the sacrifice sites, the rogue survivors, the missing wolves, the committee's corruption.

Every lie unraveled one after another. The chamber remained eerily silent.

Finally... Noah stood. "I have additional evidence."

Several Council members looked toward him. He connected his laptop. The first image appeared. It showed Claudia Stone. Next came construction blueprints, then surveillance footage and internal emails.

Noah spoke without emotion. "These files document years of Claudia Stone's criminal activities." One image after another filled the screens.

"The Grayson Group construction disaster was deliberately engineered." He enlarged several altered

Chaple 20

engineering reports.

A murmur spread through the chamber.

Noah continued. "Joshua Grayson's reported death was fabricated." Another file appeared.

My heart clenched. Even knowing the truth. seeing it displayed so plainly still hurt.

"The false evidence was manufactured. The witnesses were paid. Even the reports were altered."

The room erupted into shocked whispers.

Noah didn't stop. "Claudia Stone also directly participated in the illegalsacrifice operations connected to the Silas Organization."

Images from the underground altar flashed across the screens. Gasps echoed throughout the chamber.

An Elder slowly removed his glasses. “This is beyond unforgivable.” His voice trembled.

After a couple of hours of reviewing the cases presented before the Council, Walter Hawthorne rose slowly. “I move for the immediate arrest of Claudia Stone.”

Another Elder stood. “I second the motion.”

One after another... every hand rose. Even the remaining committee members couldn’t object.

The verdict came almost instantly. “Claudia Stone is hereby stripped of every protection previously granted by the Council. She will be formally arrested. She will stand trial for conspiracy, murder, fraud, illegal sacrifices, kidnapping, and crimes against werewolf society.”

The chamber fell silent.

Lydia finally relaxed. One monster has fallen.

The next announcement shook the werewolf world even more. The Chief Elder looked directly at me. “After reviewing all the evidence...”

He paused. “The Council officially withdraws every accusation previously made against Alpha Ronan Grayson and his family.”

Emotion tightened my throat. I lowered my head.

“The charges are dismissed. The Grayson family is formally exonerated. The Grayson name is restored.”

For several seconds... I couldn’t breathe. Father... Joshua... You finally have your honor back.

Lydia’s voice softened. They would be proud.

Tears threatened to burn my eyes. I refused to let them fall here. Instead... I simply bowed my head. “Thank you.” Those two words carried years of pain and injustice.

By evening... the news had spread across every major pack. The Grayson name had been cleared. Claudia had been arrested and charged. The corrupt council members were also being prosecuted.

I sat in my office with Noah and Ryder. “I want every recent photograph of Joshua released.”

Chapter Va

Noah immediately understood. “You want the entire werewolf world looking for him.”

I nodded. If Silas still has him...” I looked toward Joshua’s striding photograph. “They’ll find it much harder to keep moving him in secret.”

Ryder slowly smiled. “That is smart. Also, if Joshua sees the reports himself, he might finally start asking questions about what happened to him.”

Hope rose inside my chest. “Exactly.” I reached out and touched the edge of the photograph.

“I’ll find you, Joshua,” I whispered. “No matter how long it takes. And this time, I’ll bring you home.”

Chapter

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 243

Aria’s POV

I received an invitation from the Hawthorne family. It was from Alpha Walter himself. He was throwing a banquet to celebrate the return of his great-granddaughter to the Hawthorne family.

Ever since discovering Elona’s identity, he had been overjoyed.

I stared at the letter for several seconds.

Lydia sighed. We’re going, right?

Of course, it’s Elona’s party. We have to be there for Elona.

She laughed inside my head. Keep telling yourself that.

I rolled my eyes. “You’re impossible.”

Soon the day of the banquet arrived. The Hawthorne estate looked completely different from the last time I’d been there.

The entrance was decorated with silver banners bearing the family crest. Fresh flowers lined the marble pathway. Bodyguards stood at attention on both sides.

The moment Elona stepped out of the car, dozens of eyes landed on her. She instinctively reached for my hand.

“It’s okay,” I whispered. “I’m here.”

The front doors opened before we reached them. Walter Hawthorne himself walked out. His eyes immediately found Elona. For a long moment... he simply stared. Then his eyes became suspiciously bright.

His voice shook. “Come to Great-Grandpa, my child.”

Elona rushed toward him, and he hugged her gently, showering kisses on her cheeks before setting her on her feet. Damon had taken her home a few more times after telling his family she was his.

During that time, she had bonded with Walter.,

The banquet hall buzzed with conversation. Representatives from several powerful packs had attended. Everyone wanted to meet the child who carried both the Hawthorne bloodline and the Grayson bloodline.

Damon stood across the room speaking with several Alphas. Our eyes met briefly. Neither of us smiled, but neither of us looked away immediately.

Then Elona tugged my sleeve. “Mommy, I’m hungry.”

I laughed softly. “That problem I can solve.”

Dinner had barely begun when Walter rose from his seat. The entire hall fell silent. He raised his wine glass.

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Tonight. His deep voice echoed through the enormous hall. “The Hawthorne family celebrates something more important than power.” He looked toward Elona. “We celebrate family.”

Applausé erupted.

Walter continued, “For years, fate kept us apart from this precious child. His gaze softened. He extended a hand toward Elona. “I present to you all, my great-granddaughter, Elona Hawthorne.”

The hall exploded with applause once more. Many wolves rose to their feet. Several smiled genuinely. Others whispered among themselves.

Elona looked overwhelmed. She leaned closer to me. “Why is everyone clapping?”

“Because they’re welcoming you.”

She thought for a second. “Oh.” Then she waved happily at everyone.

The room burst into laughter.

Lydia chuckled. She has no idea how important she is.

Let’s keep it that way for as long as possible.

A chair scraped softly. I looked up. A young woman approached our table. It was Damon’s younger sister, Lilith. The last time we’d met... neither of us had been particularly kind.

She stopped before me. “Aria...” She took a deep breath. “I’m sorry.”

The hall gradually quieted again.

She bowed her head. “I judged you. I believed lies. I blamed you for things you never did.” She looked genuinely ashamed. “I should have trusted you.”

I remained silent.

She continued, “You protected Elona from our family, and even after everything...” Her voice broke. “You still brought Elona to meet us.” She bowed deeply. “Thank you.”

For a long moment, I simply looked at her. Then I sighed. “It’s fine. I forgive you. I’m not interested in holding onto old grudges.”

Relief flooded her face.

“But...” My expression hardened. “There are things your family still needs to answer for.”

Walter looked toward me. He knew exactly what I was referring to. I had brought it up recently.

“I know,” he said.

The room became quiet once again. I stood. “There is something everyone here deserves to hear.”

Every eye turned toward me.

“My father was framed years ago by the Hawthorne family.” I swallowed slowly.

Chapter 49-

Walter nodded gravely in acknowledgment. Murmurs filled the hall.

I continued, "He was recently cleared of all the allegations against him, allegations Alpha Damon's late father helped make possible."

The atmosphere immediately grew heavy.

The former Alpha Walter slowly closed his eyes. He rose to his feet. "She's right. My son failed justice. He allowed ambition and politics to blind him." His voice was filled with regret. "I cannot change what he did."

"No." I nodded. "You can't."

"But I can promise you something." His Alpha aura spread naturally across the hall. "As long as I draw breath, the Hawthorne family will stand behind the Grayson family." His eyes met mine. "When you move against everyone responsible, you will never stand alone."

The sincerity in his voice surprised me.

Lydia studied him quietly. He means every word he says.

I know.

Walter continued, "If there are still enemies hiding in the shadows, they will face both our families."

I inclined my head. "Then I'll remember those words, Alpha Walter."

As the banquet continued, I escaped onto one of the moonlit balconies. The cool night air helped clear my thoughts.

"You always disappear when crowds become too much."

It was Damon. I didn't need to turn around.

"I like silence."

"So do I."

He stopped beside me, leaving enough distance between us that our shoulders didn't touch.

For several moments... neither of us spoke. The mate bond remained quiet.

Lydia lifted her head. He's hurting.

Before either of us could say anything else, another voice interrupted. "There you are, guys."

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 244

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Aria's POV

It was Lady Duran. She walked onto the balcony carrying two glasses of juice. "I've been looking everywhere for both of you."

I accepted one politely. "Thank you."

She smiled far too knowingly. "I'll leave you two alone." She immediately turned and disappeared before I could object.

blinked. "Did your mother just..."

Damon sighed. "Yes, she did."

I almost laughed. "She's trying to trap us together."

"I'm well aware."

Lydia snorted. His mother has no subtlety.

"I told her to stop. I told her you will accept me back in due time," Damon admitted. "She refuses."

I rolled my eyes. "Yeah, keep dreaming."

As if to prove his point, another servant walked onto the balcony. "My Lady requested that these desserts be shared." He placed one plate between Damon and me, then left.

I stared at the single plate.

Damon rubbed his forehead. "I apologize. This isn't my doing."

"I know."

A few minutes later... Lady Duran walked past the balcony. "Oh!" She pretended to sound surprised. "You're

both still here."

Damon closed his eyes. "Mother..."

"What?"

She smiled innocently. "You two look wonderful together."

"I'm leaving," I said immediately.

Lady Duran looked disappointed. "So soon?"

"Yes."

"But..." She looked at me hopefully. "Would you at least consider getting back..."

"No." I smiled politely. "I'm not becoming Damon's mate again."

My aboulters slumped. "I haven't even finished asking."

I already know the question."

She sighed dramatically. "I still think you belong together"

I shook my head. "Good night, Lady Duran,"

I had almost reached the main entrance when a familiar voice echoed through the hall. "Leaving already?"

It was Ryder. I stopped.

"What are you doing here, Ryder?" Damon asked flatly from behind me,

Ryder adjusted the cuffs of his suit as though he'd been invited. "I happened to be nearby.

Lydia scoffed. Liar.

Several guests exchanged curious glances.

Damon frowned slightly. "I don't recall sending an invitation."

Ryder smiled without the slightest embarrassment. "You didn't."

The silence that followed was almost amusing.

“I invited myself.”

A few wolves nearly choked on their drinks.

Damon folded his arms. “What do you want?”

Ryder’s answer came without hesitation. “I’m here for Aria.”

I closed my eyes briefly. Here we go.

Ryder walked until he was standing beside me. His expression was calm, but his voice carried clearly through the banquet hall. “I think everyone should know something.”

Damon’s jaw tightened. “Ryder, don’t do anything stupid.”

Ignoring him, Ryder continued. “I care about Aria, and I am pursuing her.”

Gasps rippled through the guests.

Lydia burst into laughter inside my head. Well... he certainly knows how to make an entrance.

I resisted the urge to pinch the bridge of my nose. Damon stared at Ryder with the cold, dangerous expression of an Alpha whose patience had just reached its limit.

The air between the two dominant wolves crackled with restrained power. Neither looked away. Neither intended to back down.

Ryder’s words continued to echo through the hall. Every Alpha, every Elder, every guest suddenly found the decorations far less interesting than the drama unfolding before them.

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Damon and der west at each other. The pressure between them was enough to make YOUNGER WOÅET the shop back. Even without releasing their Alpha auras, dominance rolled off

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The musicians immediately resumed playing. Conversation slowly returned, though everyone continued stealing glances toward us.

Ryder finally looked away from Damon. He said what I came to say.

Damon's face was calm. "Have you?"

"I don't believe you."

The ball grew quiet again.

Ryder raised a brow. "You don't believe what?"

"I don't believe that you're serious." His words were blunt. "You've chased women for years, Ryder. You've

never stayed nor committed. So forgive me if I find this sudden declaration difficult to accept."

Ryder didn't look offended. Instead, he smiled faintly: "You think you know me."

"I do know you."

"No." Ryder shook his head. "You know the version of me I wanted everyone to see."

Damon folded his arms. "What exactly are you driving at?"

Several nearby guests shamelessly pretended not to listen.

Ryder shrugged. "You are right. I have lived a promiscuous life, but I never led any of those women on. They knew exactly what those relationships were. I made no promises of a future with them."

Damon's expression remained cold. "And now we're supposed to believe you've suddenly fallen in love?"

Ryder's eyes briefly shifted toward me before returning to Damon. "I didn't say suddenly. Something flickered across his face. Something strangely... nostalgic. The simply stopped running."

Those words caught my attention.

Running from what? Lydia wondered.

"I don't know."

Before Damon could respond, a sharp voice interrupted us. “Brother”

Damon’s younger sister approached. Her expression was far from pleasant. She wasn’t looking at Damon

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She was staring directly at Ryder.

“So... She laughed bitterly. “It really is true.”

Ryder looked uncomfortable. “Lilith...”

“Don’t.” Her eyes glistened. “Don’t say my name like we’re friends.”

The atmosphere shifted instantly. I frowned. Something wasn’t right.

Lilith turned toward me. “I owe you an apology.”

I blinked. “For what?”

“For what’s about to sound cruel.” She took a slow breath. “But I can’t watch another woman get hurt.”

Lydia spoke softly in my head. She’s trying to warn us.

I listened quietly.

Lilith pointed toward Ryder. “Do you know why he never committed to any woman?”

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Aria’s POV

I shook my head. “No.”

“Because he already had someone.”

My brows drew together. “What?”

“There has always been someone.” She laughed bitterly again. “I spent years thinking that one day he’d finally notice me.” Her smile turned painfully self-deprecating. “He never did.” She looked at Ryder. “You never even saw me.”

Ryder lowered his gaze. “I’m sorry.”

“I don’t want your apology.” She turned back to me. “The woman he loved disappeared years ago. He searched for her. He refused every serious relationship because of her.”

My heartbeat slowed. Disappeared?

Lilith continued, “Yes. He claimed he was already betrothed to her. He kept an old bracelet and a faded photograph. He carried them everywhere.”

Lydia suddenly became very still. Aria... could it be?

I spoke carefully. “What kind of bracelet?”

Lilith frowned, trying to remember. “A red braided cord with a tiny silver moon charm.”

My breath caught. I had that exact bracelet when I was a child. My mother had tied it around my wrist herself.

“Aria?” Ryder’s voice sounded distant.

A memory from my past surfaced. I was in my father’s study. I was about fifteen at the time.

Father smiled while looking at an old photograph.

“Your mother always worried that you would grow up lonely. So she made a promise with an old friend.”

“A promise?”

He laughed. “A childhood betrothal.”

I had wrinkled my nose. “I’m getting married?”

“That would happen when you’re much older.”

“To whom?”

“Your best friend. The boy you keep sneaking out to play with.”

“I don’t want to marry him.”

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Father laughed even harder. “You say that now.”

The memory shattered. I gasped softly.

Lydia spoke immediately. You’re remembering everything.

Slowly... my eyes lifted toward Ryder. No... it couldn’t be... Could it?

His amber eyes were already fixed on me.

Lydia whispered, It’s him. That boy from your childhood.

I looked away first. My head hurt too much to think. Too many forgotten memories were crashing back at

once.

The banquet slowly came to an end. Guests began leaving one after another. Elona had long since fallen asleep in Walter’s arms. The old Alpha looked utterly content.

“I suppose I should return this little treasure to her mother.”

He carefully handed Elona to me. She immediately curled against my shoulder, still asleep.

Lady Duran smiled fondly. “She looks peaceful.”

“She had a busy evening.”

Walter chuckled. “So did the adults.”

No one argued with that.

As we prepared to leave, Damon walked toward me. His expression had softened considerably since earlier.

“Aria.”

“Yes?”

He hesitated. Then he looked at the sleeping Elona. “I have a request.”

I waited.

“Would you consider staying at the Silvermoon Pack for a while?”

I frowned. “What?”

“For Elona.” His voice remained steady. “She just found her family. My grandfather, my mother, my sister. They’ve lost years they can never get back.”

He gently brushed one finger against Elona’s tiny hand. “I don’t want her to lose any more.”

His words weren’t manipulative. They were simply honest.

Lydia quietly observed him. He’s asking as a father. Not as a mate.

“I’d make sure you’re comfortable,” Damon continued. “You’d have your own residence. No one would pressure you. My family only wants time with Elona.”

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Hooked down at my daughter. She had spent years without knowing this side of her family. She deserved The chance to know them. Didn’t she?

She does, Lydia murmured.

But living inside Damon’s territory... seeing him every day... feeling the mate bond constantly... that would be dangerous for both of us.

I met Damon’s gaze. “I’m not promising anything. I need time to think.”

A faint smile appeared on his face. “That’s enough.”

I nodded once. “I’ll let you know my decision soon.”

As I carried Elona toward the waiting car, I couldn’t shake the feeling that accepting Damon’s invitation might give Elona the family she deserved.

At the same time... it might also force me to confront feelings I had spent years burying.

After I got home, I couldn’t stop thinking about Ryder. Not because of his ridiculous confession at the banquet, but because of the fragmented memories I recalled.

Every piece pointed in the same direction. Ryder.

Lydia paced restlessly inside my mind. You need answers.

I know.

Then stop thinking and go ask him.

That was exactly what I intended to do. The next day, I visited Ryder.

As I stepped out of the car, he was already waiting.

He smiled. "I had a feeling you'd come."

I crossed my arms. "You've been expecting me?"

"Since last night." He studied my face. "You remembered something, didn't you?"

I didn't deny it. "I have questions."

"I figured." He gestured toward the house. "Come inside."

We entered a large study. Ryder poured two cups of tea before handing one to me.

"I suppose this is the part where you interrogate me."

"I suppose it is."

He chuckled softly. "What do you want to know?"

I didn't waste time. "Tell me about your childhood."

The smile disappeared from his face. He stared into his teacup for several long seconds. Finally, he spoke. "I can't."

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!frowned. "What do you mean you can't?"

"I don't remember it."

Silence settled between us.

"You don't remember... any of it?"

He slowly shook his head. "My memories begin when I was about twelve. Everything before that is blank."

Lydia stiffened. That's not normal.

I searched Ryder's face. He wasn't lying. His heartbeat remained steady. His scent carried only frustration.

"How did that happen?"

"I don't know. All I know is that I am a half-blood. Devin told me I was injured, and that caused me to lose my memory."

That name immediately caught my attention.

"Who is Devin?" I asked.

Chapter 14-

Aria's POV

Ryder's expression softened. "He is the elder who raised me. He trained me and treated me as his own grandson."

Lydia murmured quietly. He genuinely loves the old man.

"Would you show me something?" I asked.

"What?"

"Your family photographs."

He looked surprised. "Photographs?"

I nodded. Without another question, he stood. "This way."

The hallway upstairs contained dozens of framed pictures. Some were old enough that the colors had faded. Others were recent.

Ryder pointed toward one wall. "My family history."

I slowly walked closer. Photograph after photograph, pack ceremonies, birthdays, children running through forests.

Then... I froze.

A little boy with bright golden eyes.

My breath caught.

Lydia whispered, It's him.

I stepped closer. No doubt remained. It was Ryder. Only... much younger. Exactly the age from my

memories.

I stared at another photograph. It was the same boy laughing beside a little girl... My heart skipped. Her face was partly hidden, but I recognized the red bracelet.

My fingers trembled. "That's..."

Ryder stepped beside me. "I've always wondered who she was."

"You don't know?"

He shook his head. "Devin never told me. I assumed she was some childhood friend."

"That girl... she's me." I reached out and touched the glass. "You were my playmate. We used to race through the woods behind my father's house."

Ryder went very still. "I don't remember any of that, but I approached you because you look so much like the girl from the pictures."

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"My father said my mother had us betrothed Why would she do it?" The question burned.

He had no answer. Only the same steady gaze that made my pulse trip.

My throat tightened. Something inside my chest ached.

Whoever had erased his memories had done it completely.

Lydia sighed sadly. He lost an entire childhood.

We continued walking. Then another photograph caught my attention. An elderly man stood in the center. He had silver hair and kind eyes. One arm rested on young Ryder's shoulder. The other around... I stepped closer.

Could this be the Devin Ryder talked about?

I had never met him personally. But I had seen him before. Years ago. In my mother's old photographs.

My heartbeat quickened.

Lydia immediately noticed. What's wrong?

I pointed toward the picture. "That's Devin?"

Ryder smiled. "Yes."

I swallowed. "He knew my mother."

The smile disappeared. "What?"

"I've seen him before."

"Where?"

"In my family albums. He attended several gatherings with my parents."

Ryder frowned deeply. "I didn't know they knew each other."

"Neither did I."

A cold feeling settled in my stomach. If Devin knew my mother... then this wasn't a coincidence. Not after everything I'd learned. Not after discovering my mother's connection to the curse.

I stepped closer to the photograph. There they were. Devin and my mother. Standing only a few feet apart. Smiling, looking comfortable with each other.

Lydia growled. That's not good.

No... it isn't.

Thoughts raced through my mind. If my mother had truly cursed Father... if she had planned everything... then she couldn't have acted alone.

She would have needed allies. Someone powerful, someone she trusted. Someone... like Devin.

My pulse pounded louder with every passing second. Why had my mother arranged a betrothal between

Ryder and me? Why Hyder? Why Devin's family?

Why had Ryder suddenly disappeared? Why had every memory of me been erased from his mind? None of

it made sense.

Unless... unless the betrothal itself had been part of something much bigger.

I felt a sharp pain behind my eyes. Pieces of the puzzle spun wildly through my thoughts. The curse, the sacrifice, my mother's betrayal, Devin, Ryder's missing memories, Father...

My eyes widened. Father. The curse. If Devin had been involved... then what if the curse hadn't truly ended? What if someone was waiting? Watching? Ready to finish what they'd started?

Fear unlike anything I'd felt before gripped my chest.

Lydia's voice turned urgent. Aria.

I was already backing toward the door. "I have to go."

Ryder looked startled. "What happened?"

"My father."

"What about him?"

"I think..." The words caught in my throat. "I think he's in danger."

The drive back to the care facility felt endless. Ryder pushed the car far beyond the speed limit while I sat rigid in the passenger seat, my fingers clenched so tightly that my nails dug into my palms.

Lydia paced frantically inside me. I briefed Ryder on my suspicions, and he was shocked. He could also see how they made sense.

Ryder glanced at me briefly before returning his attention to the road. "We will protect your father. They won't reach him."

I wanted to believe him. I really did.

The moment the building came into view, Lydia growled. Something is wrong, Aria.

My heart skipped. Before the car had completely stopped, I threw the door open and sprinted toward the

entrance.

The guards stationed outside weren't standing anymore. They were sprawled across the ground.

"Guards!" I shouted.

No one answered.

I dropped beside the nearest one. His pulse was steady. He was alive, but his breathing was slow. A sharp medicinal smell lingered around him.

"They've been drugged," Ryder said after checking another guard.

Lydia snarled. This wasn't a fight. Someone wanted them asleep.

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we spread through my veins. "No...

I shot to my feet and ran. "Dad!"

The nurses inside were in complete panic. People rushed through the corridors.

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Patients cried from their rooms. Equipment lay overturned across the floor. No one stopped me. No one could.

I reached my father's room and shoved the door open so hard it slammed against the wall.

"Father!"

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Aria's POV

The room was silent. My eyes immediately found Devin. He lay unconscious beside the bed.

“Damn it!”

I knelt beside him. His pulse was steady. Just like the guards outside, he was also drugged. My stomach twisted.

Slowly... terrifyingly... I looked toward the hospital bed. It was empty.

The blankets had been thrown aside. The restraints the healer had occasionally used during my father’s violent curse episodes had been cut clean through.

My father was gone.

“No...” The word barely escaped my lips. “No... no...”

My breathing became uneven.

Lydia howled inside my head. Find him!

I forced myself to stand.

Panic wouldn’t help him. Think. Think, Aria.

I closed my eyes. The blessing the Moon Goddess had granted me pulsed beneath my skin.

Warm silver energy flowed through every vein. I inhaled deeply. Then reached outward.

The world around me changed. Scents exploded into existence. Countless human scents, pack members, nurses, patients. Then... there. My father’s scent.

It was faint and fresh, moving upward.

My eyes snapped open. “The roof.”

Ryder looked at me. “You found him?”

“I can smell him.”

Without another word, I bolted from the room. My feet pounded against the staircase.

Each step made Lydia more frantic. He’s close! Hurry!

“I’m trying!”

The scent grew stronger. Almost overwhelming. My heart hammered against my ribs. Please... please let him be alive.

I burst through the rooftop door. The cold wind slammed into me. For one brief second... everything stood still.

Then I saw him. My father. He was lying motionless on the concrete. He was not moving or breathing.

“Dad!” I screamed as I ran toward him.

Halfway there... I froze. Someone was standing beside his body. A familiar figure. Broad shoulders, dark clothes, and dark hair.

He slowly turned.

My entire world shattered.

It was Joshua, my brother.

“No...” I stumbled backward. My vision blurred instantly with tears.

Joshua simply stood there, his expression unreadable.

“Dad...” My voice broke.

I looked down at my father. He hadn’t moved, not even once.

A broken sound escaped my throat. “You...” I stared at Joshua in horror. “You killed him.”

The words came out as a whisper, then louder. “You killed our father!”

Lydia let out a heart-wrenching howl inside my head. No!

Tears streamed uncontrollably down my face. “How could you do this?”

My knees trembled so violently I nearly collapsed.

Joshua didn’t answer. He simply looked at me. That silence hurt more than any confession ever could.

My heart splintered into pieces. “I spent years mourning you.” My breathing turned ragged. “Years believing your death was the cruelest thing that had ever happened to me.”

I pointed at my father’s motionless body with a shaking hand. “And now I find you standing over our father?”

The air around me exploded with silver energy. My aura surged violently. Windows beneath the rooftop rattled. Concrete cracked beneath my feet.

Lydia's grief became my own. He hurt our family.

"I don't care who you are anymore," I whispered through my tears. "I don't care if you're my brother. I don't care if I put out word searching for you."

My wolf's silver eyes burned behind mine. "If you killed our father..." I took one slow step toward Joshua. "Then I'll make you answer for it."

Silver energy exploded around me. Power surged through every vein until it became almost unbearable. The rooftop trembled beneath my feet as my aura burst free.

Joshua's expression remained eerily calm. "I don't know who you're talking about."

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The words hit me like another blow. "What?"

You keep calling me Joshua." His cold eyes studied me as though I were a complete stranger. "My name isn't Joshua."

Lydia snarled. Liar, that's your freaking name!

"It's you." My voice shook. I know your scent. I know your face. You're my brother!"

"I don't have a sister."

My heart cracked all over again. "Stop lying!"

I lunged. At the same moment, Joshua moved. He disappeared from where he stood. My instincts screamed. I twisted just in time.

His fist slammed into my shoulder instead of my chest, sending me skidding several feet across the rooftop.

Pain shot through my arm. He had become even stronger than the last time we'd crossed paths.

Lydia bared her teeth. Fight him!

I didn't hesitate. My claws burst from my fingertips. I rushed him. Our fists collided. Joshua barely moved. I, however, felt the force travel through my bones.

He countered immediately. His elbow struck my ribs. I hissed through my teeth before sweeping his legs.

He jumped over the attack with impossible agility. Then his knee drove into my stomach. Air rushed from my lungs. I stumbled backward.

“You don’t understand anything,” he said coldly.

“You kidnapped our father!” Rage swallowed reason. “You killed your own father!”

I attacked again. This time I shifted partially. Silver fur spread over my arms. My strength doubled. Claws met fists. Concrete shattered beneath every exchange.

The rooftop cracked under the pressure of our battle.

Lydia roared inside my head. Make him answer for what he has done!

I will. I drove him backward. He caught my wrist and twisted it. Pain shot through my shoulder. I slammed my forehead into his nose.

He released me instantly. I kicked him squarely in the chest. He slid several feet before regaining his balance.

He looked slightly surprised. Then he rushed me again. We collided in another brutal grapple. I wrapped both arms around him and forced him backward.

He drove his shoulder into my stomach. We crashed into the rooftop railing. Metal bent with a deafening screech. Neither of us let go.

My breathing became ragged. Tears blurred my vision. Every time I looked into his face... I saw the brother

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who need to carry me on his shoulders.

The brother who promised he’d always protect me.

Then reality crashed back. He just killed our father.

A voice suddenly cut through the chaos. “Aria!”

It was Ryder. I ignored him. Joshua threw another punch. I ducked beneath it and slammed my fist into his ribs. He grunted.

“Aria!” This time Ryder’s voice carried Alpha authority. “Stop!”

“I can’t!”

“I said stop!”

Something in his tone froze me. I looked over at him.

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 248

Aria’s POV

Ryder was kneeling beside my father. One hand rested against his neck.

Then he looked up. “Your father isn’t dead.”

Everything inside me stopped. “What?”

“He’s alive.”

I stared at him. “What did you say?”

“He’s unconscious but alive.”

The words echoed inside my head.

Lydia let out a shaky breath. He’s alive....

The frenzy that had consumed me began to loosen its grip. My heartbeat slowed. My claws slowly retracted.

I looked from Ryder... to my father... then back to Joshua. Relief flooded me so suddenly my knees nearly

buckled.

“You...” My voice trembled. “You didn’t kill him?”

Joshua said nothing.

I swallowed hard. “If you didn’t...” I took a cautious step toward him. “Then why? Why would you take our

father?”

His face remained expressionless. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"Stop saying that!"

"I don't know this man."

I stared at him in disbelief. "That's our father."

"He isn't."

My chest tightened. "Look at him!"

"I have, and I feel nothing. I feel no connection whatsoever to him or you."

Lydia whimpered. He's gone... whoever our Joshua was...

"No." I shook my head desperately. "Someone did this to you."

Joshua remained silent.

I clenched my fists. "You are working for the Silas Organization, aren't you?"

There was no response.

"What do they want from us? What is their purpose?" I asked.

His eyes finally shifted toward me. Then he spoke quietly. "The Day of Judgment is approaching."

A cold breeze swept across the rooftop.

"When that day comes, everyone will know."

"What judgment? What are you planning?"

There was no answer.

"You expect me to believe you'll throw innocent lives away for some mysterious prophecy?"

"If necessary."

My heart sank. "You'd even die for them?"

Without hesitation, he replied, "Yes. They gave my life meaning."

The conviction in his voice terrified me.

“No.” Tears burned my eyes again. “They stole your life.”

His expression didn’t change. “They opened my eyes.”

“No! They brainwashed you.” My shout echoed across the rooftop. “They took my brother!”

For the briefest moment... something flickered in his eyes.

Lydia gasped. Did you see that?

“I saw it.”

Hope exploded inside me. “Joshua...

The moment vanished. His face became emotionless once more. “You have mistaken me for someone

else.”

Before I could move, he stepped onto the rooftop ledge.

“Wait!”

He looked down at the dozens of floors below. Then back at me.

“The Day of Judgment is near.” With that... he leaned backward. And disappeared.

“No!” I sprinted toward the edge. By the time I reached it, he had already landed on the roof of a lower building with impossible precision.

He didn’t even look back. Within seconds, he vanished into the darkness.

I stood frozen.

The sagad at several black SUVs screeching to a halt outside the care facility shattered the silence.

on arrived list. The instant he saw me, his expression darkened.

“Ana.” He crossed the distance between us in seconds. His hands immediately gripped my shoulders. “Are you hurt?”

“Tim fine.”

He looked unconvinced.

Rhein's presence brushed against Lydia. Are you alright?

We're alright, Lydia answered softly.

Justin and dozens of his bodyguards spread throughout the building, securing every entrance.

"No one leaves, Damon ordered. "Seal the perimeter."

"Yes, Alpha."

Within minutes, the facility was under complete Silvermoon control. The unconscious guards were taken for treatment.

Witnesses were quietly interviewed. Security footage was confiscated before anyone else could access it.

Panic slowly gave way to order. As Alpha, Damon controlled the chaos with frightening efficiency.

The healers confirmed what Ryder had said. My father was stable. The drugs in his system had merely forced him into a deeper unconscious state. He would recover. The relief nearly brought me to tears.

A while later, Devin finally woke. He looked pale and ashamed. The moment he saw me, Damon, and Ryder, he lowered his eyes.

Damon ordered him to say exactly what he was doing in this room. He told him they had already watched the CCTV footage. He was to speak nothing but the truth if he wanted to stay alive.

I folded my arms. "Start talking. What exactly happened?"

His voice shook. "I failed." His gaze moved from Damon, to Ryder, then to me.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"1... I was going to kill your father."

The room became deathly silent.

I stared at him. "What?"

Tears filled his eyes. “I entered your father’s room intending to finish what I had started before.”

My stomach turned.

His breathing became uneven. “But someone got there before I did.”

*Joshua?”

He nodded. I thought he was there to kill Ronan too, but he stopped me.”

blinked, shocked.

“He knocked me unconscious before I could touch your father.”

I searched his face for any sign of deception. There was none.

“He... protected my father?”

“I don’t know why,” Devin admitted. “But if he hadn’t appeared...” He swallowed hard. “I would have killed

him.

The room fell silent. My mind replayed everything that had happened on the rooftop. Joshua standing beside my father. His refusal to hurt him. The way he never actually attacked Ronan.

The words Ryder had spoken. He’s alive.

Lydia’s voice was barely a whisper. We judged him too quickly.

I closed my eyes. I had looked at my brother, seen him standing over our unconscious father, and immediately believed the worst.

I had been wrong. Not completely. He was still working for the Silas Organization. He was still dangerous. But tonight... he hadn’t come to murder our father.

He had saved him.

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Chapter 249

Aria's POV

I stared at Devin. "You said Joshua stopped you." My voice was quieter now, but no less firm. "That still doesn't explain why you wanted to kill my father."

Devin lowered his head. His shoulders slumped. "I was afraid he would regain his memories."

My brows knitted together. "What do you mean?"

He let out a bitter laugh. "Ronan is remembering."

Lydia stiffened. Remembering what?

I folded my arms, refusing to let him avoid the question. "Explain."

Devin slowly lifted his head. "I think it is time to speak the truth." His tired eyes swept over everyone in the

room.

Darhon stood beside me with his arms crossed, his Alpha aura filling the room without effort. Ryder remained silent, his face pale. Justin stood behind Damon, listening carefully.

Then Devin looked back at me. "There is a curse on your father. I know you are aware of that already, but what you don't know is that your father was never an innocent victim of that curse."

I froze. "What do you mean?"

"He asked for it."

The words struck me so hard I almost laughed. "No, that can't be true."

"He did."

"You're lying." I shook my head violently. "My father would never ask to be cursed."

"He did because your mother begged him to."

The mention of my mother stole every word from my mouth.

Lydia whispered softly, Listen, Aria...

I swallowed. "You knew my mother?"

Devin nodded. "We were old acquaintances long before you were born."

Silence settled over the room again before Devin continued. "Your mother wasn't an ordinary werewolf."

His eyes met mine. "You only know a fraction of the truth. Your mother belonged to one of the oldest werewolf bloodlines in existence."

I froze, utterly shocked by the revelation.

"The ancient house that guarded the altar," Devin continued. "For generations, that family served as its

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beepers."

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The altar..." The word immediately reminded me of the underground chamber I had seen on that land, the ancient symbols, the overwhelming energy.

"It is more than an altar." Devin's expression became solemn. "It is the resting place of the sleeping source consciousness of all wolfkind."

The room became deathly still.

A chill crawled down my spine.

"The legends are true?" Damon asked quietly.

"They are." Devin nodded. "The consciousness sleeps beneath the land. If awakened... whoever controls it could influence every werewolf bloodline."

Noah's eyes widened. "You mean every Alpha?"

"Every Alpha, every Luna, every pack." His voice dropped lower. "The entire werewolf world."

My stomach twisted. "My mother's family wanted that power?"

"They believed it was their birthright."

I couldn't believe what I was hearing.

"They wanted to build a new order. An order centered around themselves," Devin replied. "One family ruling every territory."

Lydia growled. Power always corrupts.

"How were they planning to awaken it?" I asked.

Devin's expression darkened. "The altar requires the sacrifice of rogue wolves."

I already knew that much.

He looked directly into my eyes. "The greater the number of rogue wolves sacrificed..." His voice cracked with shame. "the greater the awakening."

Disgust rolled through me. "They were really going to slaughter innocent rogues?"

"They had done so before."

Lydia whimpered. They are absolute monsters. They are no different from Silas, who is currently attempting the same sacrifice.

"They also needed one more thing."

"What is that?"

"The purest-blooded female descendant of the family."

I suddenly understood. "My mother."

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"Yes" Devin replied.

The room seemed to shrink around me. "The family intended for her to become the vessel through which the altar's power would awaken, but she refused."

A faint smile crossed Devin's face. "She rejected everything they stood for

For the very first time since Devin's revelation began... I felt proud.

"So she ran?"

"Yes." His smile grew sad. "She abandoned her name, changed her identity, and lived as an ordinary she-wolf."

“Was that when she met my father?”

He nodded. “They fell deeply in love.”

I closed my eyes briefly. I could almost picture them. My father and my mother living a peaceful life they had built together.

“Then they had Joshua and me.”

“Yes, they did. She finally had the family she always wanted.”

A lump formed in my throat. “But it didn’t last.”

Devin slowly shook his head. “No.” He turned toward Ryder briefly before looking back at me. “My own mission at the time was different.”

“What mission?”

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Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 250

Aria’s POV

“I had been entrusted by Ryder’s grandfather.”

Ryder looked up in surprise. “My grandfather?”

Devin nodded. “Your family was drowning in internal power struggles. He feared you would become another casualty.”

Devin sighed. “He asked me to hide you. I lived quietly near Aria’s family while secretly protecting you.”

Ryder looked completely stunned. “You never told me that.”

“I couldn’t.”

He looked toward me. “It was also during those years... that I met with your mother, and she arranged your engagement, the betrothal between you and Ryder.”

Ryder stared at him. “You had a hand in that?”

“I believed it would protect both families.”

My head spun with all the revelations.

“But eventually...” Devin’s face darkened again. “your mother’s family found her.”

The room seemed colder.

“They came to take you.”

“Me?”

He nodded. “You carried the same blood your mother did. They wanted to force you into your mother’s

place.

Lydia’s ears flattened. They wanted another vessel.

“What happened?” I asked.

“They underestimated her.” His eyes filled with grief. “She refused and fought them at the cost of her own

life.”

Tears blurred my vision.

“Before dying... she entrusted me with one final task. She wanted the truth about the land to be kept secret and knew Ronan would never willingly keep silent.”

“So she asked me to erase part of his memories. When that happened, Ronan requested that I place a curse on him so he would never speak the truth.”

I stared at him, not knowing what to say.

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“Your father knew the truth was too dangerous,” Devin said slowly. “The curse prevented him from speaking of the altar, even if his memories returned.”

Almost everything I had believed... had been wrong. I had thought my mother had cursed my father. Instead... the curse had been my father’s own choice. A sacrifice to protect me and everyone from the

truth.

Lydia's voice trembled. They both gave everything for us.

I wiped away the tears threatening to fall.

"There is more." Devin's face filled with shame. "When Ryder grew older... I wanted him to return to his family."

Ryder remained silent.

"I wanted him to become heir, so I made a deal."

My stomach dropped. "You made a deal? With whom?"

"The Werewolf Council."

Damon's expression hardened instantly. "You sold the secret of the land."

Devin slowly nodded. "I traded the existence of the altar."

The room erupted.

"What?!" Ryder exclaimed. "You betrayed everyone!" he shouted.

"I know!" Devin closed his eyes. "I convinced myself it was worth it."

"You sold my mother's sacrifice!" I shouted.

"I know!" His voice broke. "I told myself it was only information."

"But information spreads," Noah said.

He nodded miserably. "The Council wasn't the only one who learned."

I already knew what he was about to say.

"Alpha Noah discovered the truth. He wanted the altar's power to restore the Whitemoon Pack."

I clenched my fists. "And Silas?"

Devin's face became pale. "They wanted far more."

The room fell silent again.

"They wanted complete control. They formed alliances and manipulated powerful people, like Damon's father."

Damon's jaw tightened.

"Damon's father worked with Claudia. They orchestrated the construction disaster that resulted in the

deaths of some workers years ago and framed your father. Silas is also responsible for driving you and Damon apart

My heart sank.

"They kept weakening the seal."

Every word felt like another knife.

"They are also responsible for Joshua's death," Devin continued. "They knew the shock of his death would break Ronan and help loosen the seal. The burden of protecting it nearly destroyed his mind."

Everything... everything had been calculated. Every tragedy, every betrayal, every loss.

Lydia growled softly. We've been dancing to someone else's tune.

I looked at Devin. "So you wanted to kill my father because he was remembering."

He nodded once. "If he recovered everything, my betrayal would become public." His voice cracked. "I would lose everything, and Ryder would be dragged down with me."

Ryder stared at the man who had raised him. "I would rather face disgrace than let you murder an

innocent man."

Devin couldn't meet his eyes. "I know. I was a coward."

I thought about the betrothal. Something my mother and Devin had arranged years before either Ryder or I had any say in our own lives.

Nothing about it made sense. Why did my mother decide to have Ryder and me betrothed?

Find out from him, Lydia murmured inside my head. Your mother must have had her reasons.

I lifted my eyes to Devin. The old man stood with his shoulders slumped.

"Tell me," I said quietly. "Why did my mother arrange this betrothal?"

