

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 251

+25 Paints

Aria's POV

Everyone in the room remained silent. Damon stood on my right, his arms folded tightly across his chest, his Alpha aura restrained but restless.

Noah leaned casually against the wall, though his sharp eyes never left Devin.

Ryder was equally tense.

Devin lowered his head. "I wish I knew."

A knot tightened inside my chest. "You don't?"

He slowly shook his head. "Your mother never explained her full intentions to anyone. She only told me that if fate remained merciful... one day you would understand."

I frowned. "That's it?"

"I'm afraid so."

Disappointment settled heavily in my stomach. I had hoped he would finally unravel one of the countless mysteries surrounding my family. Instead... another dead end.

Devin looked directly into my eyes. "But your mother..." he whispered. "She could see farther than most Alphas and Lunas. Every move she made carried purpose. If she arranged this union, then she must have foreseen something none of us could."

His words lingered. He wasn't giving me answers. He was giving me faith. Faith in a woman who was no longer here to explain herself.

Mother... what did you see?

Lydia brushed gently against my consciousness. She trusted you to finish what she started.

Before I could speak again, Devin suddenly stepped backward. His expression changed.

"I have spent centuries serving evil," he said softly.

My instincts screamed. Something seemed wrong.

“I watched innocent wolves die.” His voice trembled. “I helped expose knowledge that became weapons in the wrong hands.”

He reached inside his robe. Damon instantly straightened.

Lydia growled. He is reaching for a weapon.

Devin pulled out a silver dagger.

“No!” I lunged. The blade swung toward his own throat. I caught his wrist just before the dagger touched his skin. The impact stung my palm.

Chapter Ns

The rough exploded into motion.

Damon was beside me in a heartbeat, wrenching the dagger away Noah seized Devin’s other arm. Ryder grabbed his shoulders before the old man could struggle free.

“What are you doing?” I shouted.

Devin collapsed to his knees. “I deserve death. His voice cracked. “My sins cannot be washed away

“You think dying fixes everything?” I snapped.

“It is the only atonement left.”

“No.” I knelt in front of him. “No, it isn’t.”

His hollow eyes slowly lifted to mine. “An old man with regrets?” He laughed bitterly

“You possess knowledge of ancient curse lore, hidden rituals, the history Slas erased. You’ve spent years gathering information.”

I leaned closer. “If you truly regret Silas using the secret you leaked to the Werewolf Council for evil...” My voice hardened. “Then spend the rest of your life destroying everything he built

There was silence. Everyone watched him.

I continued. “You owe every wolf who died. You owe every family Slas destroyed. You owe my brother

Joshua's face flashed across my mind. I swallowed painfully

"You also owe my father." My chest tightened as I thought of my father trapped beneath the curse

Devin closed his eyes. Tears slipped down his weathered face. L. don't deserve forgiveness

"I'm not offering forgiveness." I held his gaze. 'I'm offering purpose."

Lydia spoke softly inside me. Broken wolves don't need permission to rise. They need someone who believes they still can.

Finally, Devin bowed his head. "I swear..." His voice shook. "I will dedicate whatever years remain to ending Silas."

Relief washed over me. We had one more ally. One more mind fighting for us instead of against us

But then Devin looked up again. His expression became grave. "You should not misunderstand. Even with everything I know..." He inhaled deeply. "you cannot defeat Silas."

The room grew still.

I frowned. "What do you mean?"

Devin's voice became almost fearful. "You have never seen Silas' true power. I have. Our combined strength isn't enough."

The fear in his eyes wasn't ordinary. It was the kind left behind by nightmares that never truly ended

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29 Cuints

If every Alpha in this room and their men stood together..." He swallowed. "Silas would still slaughter Them all."

I could almost feel the unease rolling off everyone's wolves.

"He has absorbed powers no ordinary Alpha should possess," Devin continued. "He knows magic older than any existing pack. He prepared for rebellion long before anyone dared dream of one."

"So we attack smarter," I replied.

His brows lifted.

“We don’t challenge him head-on,” I continued. “We destroy the bloodline curse. We free every wolf still trapped beneath him. We weaken his foundation and uncover every weakness he has hidden.”

I looked around the room. “This war isn’t won by strength alone. It be won by taking away everything that makes him untouchable.”

Lydia’s eyes burned within me. One chain at a time, one prison at a time. Until the king stands alone.

At my words, Devin’s hopeless eyes showed the smallest spark of hope.

A few minutes later, Ryder turned toward me.

“Aria, I’d like to speak with you in private,” he said.

Before I could answer, Damon’s voice cut through the room. “No, there will be no private meetings.”

Noah folded his arms. “I agree.”

The atmosphere immediately became heavier.

Voze

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Aria’s POV

Ryder glanced between Damon and Noah. “None of you decides if she gets to go with me or not. She does.”

“It is clear you want to speak to her regarding the betrothal. I need you to know that it changes nothing,” Damon said, looking directly at Ryder.

“That’s right,” Noah agreed. “It changes nothing.”

“Again, that is not your decision to make,” Ryder replied. He turned to me. “Can I speak to you alone? Please.”

“You can speak here,” Damon said.

I glanced at Damon and Noah and sighed. “You two are impossible.”

Damon frowned. “So you’re going?”

“Yes. I’m capable of having one conversation alone with Ryder.”

Noah rubbed his forehead. “That’s not the point.”

“It is exactly the point.” I smiled faintly. “I’ll be fine.”

Lydia laughed. They sound like two possessive wolves guarding their mate.

Don’t encourage them. I have not picked any of them as my mate yet.

Ignoring both Alphas’ protests, I walked outside with Ryder. For a while, neither of us spoke.

Finally, Ryder broke the silence. “You know I searched everywhere for you, for the girl in that picture, the girl whose bracelet was in my possession.”

I looked at him.

I didn’t know what to say.

“I lost all my childhood memories,” he continued, “but somehow, I kept recovering fragments of our time together.”

He smiled warmly and stared into space. “Now I get to find out that we are betrothed. Perhaps fate had already decided something before either of us was born.”

He turned to me, his eyes pleading. “I would love to honour the betrothal, Aria. Please be my mate.”

I sighed and looked toward the distant mountains.

“I can’t, Ryder, and it’s not that I dislike you or anything. I just don’t want a mate at the moment.”

His shoulders stiffened ever so slightly.

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“Besides...” I continued, “a piece of paper doesn’t get to decide my life.”

He remained silent.

+25 Roints

“I don’t even understand why my mother arranged this. If I don’t know her reasons...” I met his eyes. “...then I can’t make any decision.”

His expression dimmed.

“I don’t want this to change who we already are We’re allies. We trust each other. I’d like to keep it that way.”

He stared at me for several seconds before releasing a quiet breath. “And if one day you discover your mother’s reason?”

“Then I’ll face that decision when the truth is finally in front of me.

Ryder gave a slow nod. “I was hoping for a different answer.”

“I’m sorry, Ryder.”

He smiled sadly. “You don’t have to apologize. I understand.” He extended his hand. “In that case, we remain friends?”

I smiled and shook it. “Friends.”

The tension eased between us. Whatever my mother’s plans had been, I refused to let secrets from the past dictate my future. Not until every truth was finally brought into the light. And before any of that, Silas

had to fall.

The rogues had fully settled in much bigger lands within my estate, lands Damon had made available to

them.

They could now move freely through the city without the constant fear that had shadowed them when they first arrived.

I stood on the overlook with Lydia, watching a few of them approach my apartment.

Look at them, Lydia whispered proudly. They don’t smell afraid anymore.

She was right. Their scents had changed. They were now laced with hope, trust, and a sense of belonging.

A smile found its way onto my lips. “We actually did it.”

Lydia brushed against my thoughts. No. We gave them the chance to do it themselves.

Footsteps approached behind me. One of the guards Damon had assigned to me for protection stopped a respectful distance away. “Ms. Aria.”

I turned. “What is it?”

“A few of the rogues have come. They would like to speak to you.”

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“They are no longer rogues. They are now part of us. Bring them in.”

-28 Ponts/

A few minutes later, six wolves entered. Garrick, the eldest, was one of them. Then there was Mae, a healer. There was also Finn, who I had come to learn used to be a blacksmith and had continued in that trade since joining our pack.

Right now, every one of them had found work over the past month. Some farmed, some crafted weapons, and some trained with our pack’s patrols. No one depended on handouts anymore. They all now had lives again.

Finn stepped forward first. He bowed his head. “Ms. Aria.”

I immediately shook my head. “You don’t need to bow every time.”

A small smile crossed his weathered face. “We want to.”

Behind him, several others nodded.

Mae smiled warmly. “You gave us back our dignity.”

Emotion tightened my throat. “I only gave you a safe place.”

“No,” Garrick corrected gently with a smile. “You gave us something we thought we’d lost forever, a place to permanently call home, and for that, we are eternally grateful.”

I smiled despite the lump in my throat. “I am glad to have you all as part of my family and pack.”

They thanked me from their hearts.

A few seconds later, Garrick spoke again. His smile disappeared. “There is something else.”

Every instinct sharpened. “What is it?”

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Aria’s POV

Garrick’s expression darkened. “Some of our brothers and sisters are still held captive by Silas.”

The warmth inside the room vanished.

+25 Ports

Mae nodded and looked directly into my eyes. “We aren’t asking you to wage war for revenge. We’re asking...” Her voice broke. “...please help us bring them home.”

Pain settled heavily inside my chest. Joshua flashed across my mind. Then my father, still lying unconscious because of Silas. I understood that desperation all too well.

I looked around the room. “I promise you this.” Every eye fixed on me. “I won’t stop until every wolf Silas imprisoned is free.”

Lydia’s growl echoed proudly. Every cage will break.

The rogues lowered their heads in silent gratitude.

That evening, Damon, Ryder, Noah, and I met again to investigate Silas and share intel with each other. We were in my study, maps and documents covering the table.

“We’ve confirmed intelligence,” Damon said, spreading several reports across the table.

“These reports show that Silas is recognized by the public as a philanthropist. The only thing is, no one has really seen him except those he has personally worked with.”

I almost laughed. The monster acted every bit the perfect gentleman. Disgust twisted inside me. “He hides very well.”

Damon's expression hardened. "Yes, he always has."

Noah picked up another report. "Public approval remains incredibly high. He donates millions every year to hospitals, schools, orphanages, and even disaster relief."

Ryder sighed. "To the public... he's practically a saint."

Lydia snarled. A monster wearing a wolf's skin.

Damon tossed a file toward me. "Three days from now, he will be hosting a charity gala."

I looked up. "Are you serious?"

Damon nodded. "It'll be attended by government officials, Alpha families, CEOs, and media figures."

I studied the guest list. Hundreds of influential names were invited. This was a perfect opportunity. "If we get inside... we may finally learn something."

Damon nodded. "There's more."

He opened the door to the study, and Garrick entered, carrying several rolled blueprints.

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+25 Pants

"I told Garrick, the leader of the new wolves who are now part of us, about it, and it seems he knows a few things about the venue where this gala will be held."

All eyes fell on Garrick. "That's right. I know quite a few things that might be of help."

He spread the blueprint across the table. Everyone leaned forward.

"What are these?" Ryder asked.

"The blueprint of the gala venue."

My eyes widened. "You've been there?"

He nodded. "I worked maintenance inside one of Silas' estates."

His finger traced several hallways. Then he pointed toward a narrow hidden passage behind one wall. "This."

Noah leaned closer. "What's there?"

“A concealed route. It connects the staff quarters directly to Silas’ private wing.”

The room became silent. “You’ve actually seen it?”

“Yes.” He tapped another section. “Security cameras cover every public hallway. But not this passage.”

“Why?”

“Only trusted personnel knew it existed.”

My heartbeat quickened. This wasn’t luck. This was exactly the opening we needed.

I looked at Damon, then Noah. “We’re going.”

Damon answered instantly. “No, you’re not going.”

I blinked. “No?”

“Absolutely not, Aria. You’ll be in danger. Let us handle this.”

Noah nodded. “I agree.”

I stared at both of them. “Seriously?”

“It’s too dangerous,” Damon said. “Silas could recognize you.”

“And if he doesn’t,” Noah added, “someone else might.”

“I’ll wear a disguise.”

Damon folded his arms tighter. “No, you’re not.”

I looked directly at Damon and crossed my arms. “You do realize saying ‘no’ repeatedly isn’t actually an argument, right?”

Garrick quietly looked away, clearly pretending not to hear.

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Lydia harked with laughter. He is just trying to protect you, Aria.

Well, I don’t need his protection.

Noah rubbed his temple. Tçan forge an identity.”

That immediately caught my attention. “You can?”

He gave me a small smile. “I’ve had... experience creating documents.”

+25 Pointe

Noah reached into his briefcase. “I can build a complete background, identification, financial records, business history, even digital footprints.”

Garrick stared. “That’s... impressive.”

“I’ll also make sure no database flags you.”

Damon looked between us. “I have a bad feeling about it.”

“Don’t worry, Damon,” Noah answered calmly. “Nothing will happen. I will be careful.”

“I still object.”

Lydia chuckled. Poor Alpha. He never wins these battles. He’s trying to keep us alive.

The following afternoon, Noah returned carrying a sealed envelope. He handed it to me. Inside was everything: an identity card, an invitation, and business registration.

I looked up in disbelief. “This is perfect.”

Noah shrugged. “No one will question it.”

I thanked him. Garrick also came with some of the ex-rogues. He brought a package. Inside lay a neatly folded black staff uniform for the catering department.

He also placed an electronic access card beside it. “I kept one after escaping.”

“It still works?”

“It should. We are all fully at your service should you need us.”

I looked around the room. This wasn’t just my mission anymore. It belonged to every wolf Silas had ever

hurt.

I closed the envelope carefully. Then I looked at the faces surrounding me. “This gala.” I smiled. “Silas thinks he’s hosting the most important people in the country.”

Lydia’s eyes gleamed. He has no idea he’s inviting a huntress into his den.

I tightened my grip on the forged invitation. “Let’s see what secrets our generous philanthropist has been hiding.”

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Chapter 254

Aria’s POV

+35 Polity

The evening of the gala arrived faster than I would have liked. My room looked as though a storm had swept through it.

Three gowns lay across the bed: one deep emerald, one midnight black, and one silver that shimmered like moonlight whenever it caught the light. I stood in front of the mirror with my arms folded, unable to decide.

Lydia padded around inside my mind, far more interested in the mission than the clothes. Wear the black.

I reached for the emerald dress. “I wasn’t asking.”

I held the gown against myself. It fit perfectly, elegant enough for a room full of billionaires and Alphas, but not so extravagant that anyone would remember me.

That was exactly what I needed. Invisible.

As soon as I was done getting dressed, a knock sounded at my door before it opened.

“I don’t like that dress.”

I didn’t even have to turn around to know who it was.

“It was Damon.”

He walked into the room with Noah and Ryder close behind him.

I blinked. “Did all three of you decide to invade my room together?”

Noah smiled. “We came for an important discussion.”

Lydia snorted. This should be entertaining. I already knew what was coming.

Damon looked at the gown again. "It makes you stand out. Whatever you wear should make you too forgettable."

I rolled my eyes. "It's a gala, Damon. People are supposed to stand out."

Ryder cleared his throat. "Actually..." He looked at me with a faint smile. "I came to ask if you'd allow me to escort you tonight."

There was silence. Then Damon spoke immediately. "No."

Ryder frowned. "I wasn't asking you."

"You don't need to. I should be the one to escort her."

Noah shook his head. "I disagree."

I looked toward him. He met my eyes. "I should escort her."

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I stared at him. "You too?"

"It makes the most sense if I go with her."

Damon folded his arms. "I'm her mate."

Noah calmly replied, "Yes, it is public knowledge that you both are mates, which is exactly why you shouldn't be seen beside her."

Ryder growled possessively inside Damon. She belongs beside us.

Lydia immediately answered. She belongs beside herself.

I bit back a smile.

435 Pools

Ryder stepped forward. "I've attended enough elite events. I know how these people think. I'd make the better escort."

Damon looked at him flatly. "The answer is no."

I pinched the bridge of my nose. "You three..."

None of them were listening anymore.

“I know gala etiquette better than either of you,” Ryder argued. “I’ve spent years negotiating with wealthy investors.”

Noah shrugged. “I’ve infiltrated far more dangerous gatherings.”

Damon’s eyes narrowed. “That sounds suspicious. Anyway, you are a hacker. What was I expecting?”

Noah huffed. “You can say whatever you want. I would be the best fit to go with Aria.”

The room descended into complete chaos as the three men continued talking over each other.

Finally, I snapped before I even realized it. “Enough!”

The room fell instantly silent.

I exhaled slowly. “I appreciate that all of you are worried. I really do.” I looked at each of them. “But I’m still capable of making my own decisions.”

No one argued.

I turned toward Noah. “You’re escorting me.”

Damon’s jaw tightened. Ryder looked disappointed. I continued before either of them could interrupt.

“Noah moves naturally in high-society circles. He won’t draw suspicion like either one of you. Also, he already created my identity. Our cover stories match. He won’t attract unnecessary attention.”

I faced Damon. “You and Ryder have another job.”

His eyes softened slightly. “What is that?”

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the extraction route clear.”

Ryder slowly nodded. “That sounds fair.”

“Alright then, everything is settled.”

An hour later, Noah and I stepped from the limousine beneath a sea of flashing cameras at the charity gala venue.

Crystal chandeliers glittered behind towering glass windows. Luxury cars lined the entrance. Business tycoons, pack leaders, celebrities, every influential figure imaginable seemed to be walking through those doors.

I adjusted the emerald gown one last time. Noah offered me his arm. “Ready?”

I slipped my hand through his. “As I’ll ever be.”

Lydia’s senses sharpened immediately. There are too many strangers. Too many predators pretending to smile.

She wasn’t wrong. Every scent carried ambition, power, greed, or fear. The smiles looked polished. The eye’s didn’t. We had all masked our scents to avoid being detected.

A hostess greeted us. “Good evening. Can I see your invitation?”

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Aria’s POV

Noah handed over the forged documents without hesitation. The hostess scanned them.

Finally, she smiled politely. “Welcome, Mr. and Miss Blackwood. I hope you enjoy your evening.”

We walked inside. Only after we entered the ballroom did I finally breathe normally again.

Noah leaned closer without moving his lips. “The documents worked.” His expression remained perfectly pleasant for anyone watching. “You don’t need to look nervous.”

“I’m not.”

He smiled faintly. “Alright, if you say so.”

Music drifted through the ballroom. Champagne glasses clinked. Conversations flowed effortlessly around us.

I smiled politely at passing guests while quietly observing everything, the security teams, the camera locations, emergency exits, serving staff. Every detail mattered.

Lydia prowled restlessly inside me. North wall has six guards. One is armed with silver.

I casually reached for a glass of champagne from a passing waiter. Without drinking it, I continued walking.

Near the ballroom entrance, four guards rotated every eight minutes. Near the western corridor, only two remained stationed. Interesting.

I allowed Noah to introduce me to several guests using our fabricated identities. Each conversation gave me another excuse to move through the ballroom.

“It is so wonderful to meet you. I’ve heard so much about your company,” I would occasionally say.

The lies rolled smoothly from my tongue. Every smile bought another opportunity to observe.

Eventually, I spotted a hallway guarded by seven armed men. Unlike the others, these wolves weren’t pretending to mingle. They stood perfectly still, alert and disciplined. I slowed my pace.

Lydia immediately growled. There.

One of the guards briefly opened the door for another security officer. For less than a second, I caught a glimpse inside. There were mahogany shelves, dark wooden furniture, and a massive desk.

That must be Silas’ office.

My pulse quickened. Found you.

I continued walking without looking back.

Noah quietly asked, “Have you confirmed?”

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+25 Prinny

Lemiled politely at another guest as though discussing wine. “Yes, I have. There are seven guards outside “This door.””

I recalled the hiddermarrow passage Garrick showed us on the blueprint. According to him, it had no visible guards but likely had motion sensors.

I turned to Noah. “I need to go to the hidden narrow passage.”

He nodded almost imperceptibly. “I’ll create an opening.”

Minutes later, Noah deliberately approached a circle of influential investors. Within seconds, he had drawn nearly everyone's attention. His charm was effortless.

Laughter spread across the group. One guest recognized him, then another. Soon, several prominent figures surrounded him, asking questions and inviting introductions.

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Even two members of the security team shifted their attention toward the growing crowd. Exactly as Noah intended.

Lydia's ears perked. Now.

I set my untouched champagne on a passing tray. No one noticed. Everyone was watching Noah. I slipped silently away from the ballroom, my heels making almost no sound against the polished marble floor.

The noise of the ballroom faded behind me with every careful step. Laughter, music, the clink of crystal glasses, all of it became distant until only silence remained.

I walked with the confidence of someone who belonged there, my staff access badge clipped discreetly beneath my evening wrap.

Anyone who glanced my way would see another member of the gala staff carrying out her duties.

Lydia prowled restlessly inside me. There are no guards in sight.

They're close, I answered silently.

I can smell silver.

The scent hung faintly in the air. Silver weapons, disinfectant, polished wood, and expensive cologne.

I reached the service corridor Garrick had marked on the blueprint. Exactly where he said it would be.

The ordinary hallway ended at what looked like a decorative wooden wall. Anyone else would have walked straight past it.

I pressed my fingers against the carved panel exactly where Garrick had instructed. Click. The hidden door shifted inward without a sound. A cold draft greeted me.

Good memory, Lydia murmured.

Good intelligence, I corrected.

I slipped inside before quietly closing the door behind me. Darkness surrounded me. The narrow passage smelled of dust and old stone, as though it hadn't been used in years.

Only tiny recessed lights illuminated the path ahead.

+25 Ports

My heartbeat slowed. This was the dangerous part. There were no crowds, no witnesses, no easy escape, only Silas' private territory.

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Chapter 256

Aria's POV

+25 Para

Several minutes later, I reached the end of the passage. A narrow crack the wall allowed me to look into another corridor. Two guards were carrying silver blades. Their conversation drifted toward me.

"Rotation changes in five. The boss doesn't want anyone near the office."

"I heard. I still don't understand why."

"Don't ask questions."

They continued walking. Only after they disappeared around the corner did I silently step into the hallway.

The corridor was nothing like the rest of the building. It had dark marble floors and black walls, no paintings, no decorations. Everything here felt cold, as though warmth itself had been forbidden.

Lydia suddenly froze. Wait.

I stopped instantly. "What?"

Something smells wrong.

I crouched slowly, closed my eyes, and extended every one of my senses. There was nothing. Then I caught a faint metallic scent, barely noticeable.

My gaze dropped to the floor. Tiny crimson symbols had been carved into the marble itself, so faint they disappeared beneath the polished surface. Runes... blood runes.

I felt my stomach tighten. "These are blood wards."

Lydia's ears flattened. They're alive.

I watched carefully. The crimson symbols pulsed once, then again, almost like a heartbeat.

Realization struck me. "They're sensing blood." Not movement, not sound... blood. The moment someone crossed them, Silas would know.

I crouched lower, studying the intricate pattern. The runes weren't spread across the entire corridor. There were gaps, small ones. Almost invisible.

I took a slow breath. "If I step exactly..." I measured the distance with my eyes. "there..."

Lydia grumbled. Remember, one mistake and we're caught.

I know.

Carefully, I shifted my weight onto one foot. I stepped between two glowing symbols and waited. Nothing happened. I took another step, then another. Each movement was slower than the last.

Sweat slid down my neck despite the cool air. One wrong angle, one misplaced heel, one drop of blood, everything would be over.

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Finally, I reached the opposite side. I released a quiet breath.

Lydia wagged her tail proudly. We are still graceful.

I smiled faintly. "Don't jinx us."

+25 Pam

The office door stood only a few metres away. It looked ordinary. Dark oak. Brass handle. There was nothing remarkable. Except there wasn't a keyhole.

I frowned. "What kind of lock is this?"

I examined the frame carefully. There was nothing. No keypad, no electronic reader, no hidden switch. Only a tiny silver plate no larger than a fingertip.

Lydia sniffed. It needs blood..

Understanding dawned immediately. "Blood recognition." Only someone carrying the correct bloodline could enter.

I touched the tiny communicator hidden beneath my earring. "Noah."

Static crackled briefly before his calm voice answered. "I'm here."

"I've reached the office."

"Already? That was quick."

"Yes. The problem is, there is no lock on the door."

There was a pause, then Noah sighed. "Describe the door. Tell me exactly what you see."

I explained everything quietly. Another silence followed. Finally, he spoke. "That's not mechanical. It's blood-sense encryption."

I leaned closer to the silver plate. "So we can't pick it."

"No. We'll have to fool the sensing mechanism."

"Can you?"

"I'm trying."

I could hear rapid typing through the communicator. Even from here, I pictured Noah sitting somewhere inside the gala with his phone hidden beneath the tablecloth, breaking into every security system he could reach.

"Give me a minute."

I nodded instinctively. "Alright, hurry."

I kept watch over both ends of the corridor while Noah worked. Every second felt longer than the last. Then his voice returned. "Aria."

"I'm listening."

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ean interfere with the electronic monitoring. But the blood lock..." His voice grew quieter. "It isn't connected to the network."

I frowned. "So?"

"So I can't hack blood."

I almost laughed despite the tension. "Fair point."

"I'm thinking."

I studied the silver plate again. "There has to be another way. If the mechanism needs blood... maybe we can trigger a maintenance override."

I waited. There was another burst of typing. Then Noah spoke again. "I've found something."

"What is it?"

"There should be an emergency release."

"Where?"

"I'm tracing the building plans." He paused, then added, "Check the left side of the frame, near knee height."

I knelt immediately. I ran my fingers beneath the decorative molding. There was nothing. I checked higher, still nothing.

Then I touched a tiny recessed panel. "I found it."

"Can you open it?"

I slipped a fingernail beneath the edge. The cover silently popped free. Inside sat several tiny metallic components.

Noah inhaled sharply. "Good. I need you to..."

Before he could finish, a strange sensation crawled across the back of my neck. Every instinct exploded.

Lydia snarled. Someone's behind us!

I spun. It was too late. Something struck me from behind, and the world lurched violently. My knees buckled. The communicator slipped from my fingers.

“Aria?” Noah’s distant voice echoed through the earpiece. “Aria!”

My vision blurred. The corridor twisted around me. I tried to reach for the attacker. My fingers brushed fabric, nothing more.

Then a familiar scent reached me.

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Clasty

Aria’s POV

Lydia inhaled sharply. We’ve smelled this before.

My heart pounded. Where? When? I couldn’t remember. But I knew it. I knew this scent.

Fragments of memory flashed through my mind. Faces, voices, pack meetings, hospitals, and ever

training grounds. None of them stayed long enough for me to grasp.

Who could it be...? Lydia growled desperately.

I tried to turn. Tried to see the face behind me. Darkness swallowed the edges of my vision.

The last thing I heard was Noah’s panicked voice crackling through the fallen communicator. “Aria!

Answer me!”

I opened my mouth. No sound came out. The familiar scent lingered around me, maddeningly

close, but before I could place where I’d encountered it before, everything went black.

Consciousness returned in fragments. Pain came first... a sharp, throbbing ache spread through

the back of my skull, each heartbeat sending another wave through my head.

Then came the darkness. I tried to open my eyes, but nothing changed. I had been blindfolded.

I tested my hands. There was a rope. My wrists were bound tightly behind my back. My ankles were tied together. I tried to shift my body, but nothing happened.

It was not because the ropes were too tight, but because my muscles refused to obey me. A strange heaviness weighed down every limb.

Lydia? There was a pause before my wolf answered.

I'm here.

Relief flooded through me. What's wrong with us?

She growled low in my mind. We have been subdued with wolfsbane.

My stomach tightened. Of course. The blow alone wouldn't have left me this weak. They had

drugged me.

I forced myself to remain perfectly still. Don't panic. Observe and listen.

The ground beneath me vibrated rhythmically. I could tell I was not in a vehicle or a build water. I frowned inwardly. A ship?

Lydia inhaled deeply. I smell salt, diesel, and ocean air.

Clair

She was right. The air carried the unmistakable scent of seawater mixed with engine oil. So they

had moved me after knocking me unconscious. Smart, very smart.

Something beneath me creaked. Wood. No, a crate. I shifted ever so slightly. The walls around me

were close. I was inside a wooden box.

Before I could test anything else, the crate lurched. Someone was pushing it. I heard muffled

voices outside.

“Be careful, she’s worth too much. Boss said no damage.”

A second voice laughed. “They always say that.”

Music drifted faintly through the wooden panels. Elegant music, people talking, glasses clinking.

We were obviously not at the gala because it was on land.

This was something else. Far larger, far more crowded.

I think it is an auction, Lydia whispered.

The word settled uneasily inside me. Maybe.

The wheels rolled over metal, a ramp, then smooth flooring. The voices became louder. There

were dozens. No, hundreds of people.

Someone struck a microphone. “Ladies and gentlemen...” Applause erupted. I felt the crate stop

moving.

A man’s voice echoed through the speakers. “Our next item is particularly rare.”

Item.

The word alone made my blood boil.

Lydia snarled violently. They’re selling wolves.

My fingers curled into fists behind my back. Every instinct screamed at me to break free and stop

them. Instead, I remained perfectly still because this was exactly what we had anticipated might

happen.

Before leaving for the gala, Noah had handed me a tiny tracking chip. He held it between two

fingers. “If things go wrong...”

Ryder looked at the tiny device. “You actually expect them to?”

O

* Chapter 254

“I expect every possibility.” Noah smiled faintly. “You don’t survive my line of work by believing plans never fail.”

Damon had immediately frowned. “I don’t like this conversation.”

Chaint

Noah continued anyway. “The tracker can’t be detected. It serves as both a tracker and a communication device. They can search your clothes. They can take your phone. They’ll never find

this.”

He carefully pressed the tiny device beneath the lining of my bracelet. “It only activates if your

heartbeat spikes dramatically or if I trigger it remotely.”

I looked at him. “So if I’m captured...”

“I’ll find you.”

Damon stepped closer. “And Ryder and I will already be moving.”

I met both of their eyes. “No reckless rescues.”

Damon almost smiled. “You’re asking the impossible.”

“I mean it. If I’m taken...” I glanced between them. “Follow the trail. Find where they lead you. Don’t

waste the opportunity.”

Ryder nodded first. “We’ll trust your judgment.”

Damon hesitated. Then he finally sighed. “Fine.”

Now, lying helpless inside this crate, I prayed they had kept that promise.

H

HE

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 258

Akia's POV

Clavy

The crate stopped moving completely. Heavy footsteps approached. Metal latches clicked open. Bright light exploded through the cracks. The lid swung upward.

Even through the blindfold, the sudden brightness burned against my eyes.

Rough hands grabbed my arms. "Get her up."

My legs barely obeyed as they dragged me onto my feet. The wolfsbane still coursed through my system. I let my body sag. Let them believe I was completely helpless.

Play weak, Lydia agreed. Hunters relax around wounded prey.

They led me forward several steps. The blindfold was ripped away. Light stabbed into my eyes. I

blinked repeatedly until the room finally came into focus.

My breath caught. It wasn't an ordinary auction hall. It was a luxurious underground theatre built

beneath what looked like the hull of an enormous ship.

Crystal chandeliers hung from the ceiling. Rows of velvet seats stretched across the lower floor.

Private balconies overlooked the stage.

The audience made my stomach churn. It was filled with pack nobles, business magnates, crime

syndicates, mercenaries, and smugglers.

Every face carried either wealth or blood. Some wore expensive tuxedos. Others wore casual clothes. A few openly displayed scars earned through countless battles. None of them looked

shocked.

This wasn't their first auction. This was entertainment.

I was standing on a raised platform beneath brilliant white lights. A chain had been attached

discreetly to my ankle.

The auctioneer smiled broadly. "Ladies and gentlemen..." He gestured toward me. "Our newest

acquisition."

Polite applause echoed through the hall. Rage threatened to consume me.

Lydia's claws scraped violently inside my consciousness. Let me out. They deserve to bleed.

Calm down, Lydia. I forced myself to breathe evenly. Let's observe first and fight later.

My gaze slowly swept across the room. There was security. Six guards beside each exit, snipe

TII

O

on the upper balconies, hidden cameras, and armed wolves near every pillar.

Cta

Interesting. I committed everything to memory, every hallway, every emergency exit, every security

rotation.

If Damon came, if Noah traced me, if Ryder led the assault, they would need every detail,

The auctioneer continued talking. "She's a rare beauty. Young and healthy with strong wolf blood."

My stomach twisted with disgust.

One man laughed. "I'll start at ten million."

Another paddle immediately rose. "I bid twelve million dollars."

"Fifteen."

"Twenty."

The numbers climbed almost instantly, as though they were bidding on artwork and not a living

wolf.

I kept my expression blank... helpless and broken. Exactly what they expected.

Then a familiar laugh reached my ears. It was cold and mocking. I slowly turned my head.

Claudia.

She sat elegantly in the third row, dressed in a crimson evening gown. A crystal paddle rested lazily

in her hand. When our eyes met, she smiled with pure hatred.

"There she is," she murmured, loud enough for me to hear. "I've waited a long time for this." She

lifted her paddle. "Thirty million."

Several buyers glanced toward her before raising their own paddles.

"Thirty-five."

"Forty."

"Forty-five."

Claudia didn't hesitate. "Sixty million."

Gasps spread through the audience. She wasn't bidding because she wanted me. She was bidding

because she wanted no one else to have me.

Lydia growled so fiercely I felt the vibration through my entire body. She wants to have us
can end us.

I know.

Clang

Glaudia leaned back comfortably, her smile widening. “You ruined everything, Aria.” She
mouthed

the words silently. Now it’s my turn.

I held her gaze without flinching. Enjoy your victory while you can because Damon, Noah,
Ryder, if everything has gone according to plan, you’re already following the trail straight
into the heart of

this nightmare.

And when they arrived, the hunters would discover they had unknowingly gathered every
monster

in one place.

In the end, I was bought. Not by someone whose face I recognized, but by an anonymous
bidder

who had paid an obscene amount of money for me, outbidding Claudia.

The auctioneer’s voice echoed through the chamber as the final bid was announced.
“Sold.”

The guards came for me shortly afterward. They didn’t bother telling me where we were
going. They simply dragged me through a series of corridors until we reached a private
elevator.

The moment the doors closed, I lowered my head and pretended to be frightened.

Before the operation, I had studied Silas’ organization’s known trafficking routes, shell
companies,

and suspected safe houses.

One particular vessel had repeatedly appeared in the background of intelligence reports,
but there

had never been enough evidence to confirm its purpose. Could it be this one?

The elevator finally stopped. The doors opened onto a private hallway lined with dark wood and gold fixtures. There was too much luxury, the kind designed to make people forget they were

prisoners.

One of the guards unlocked a door and shoved me inside.

“Enjoy your stay,” he said with a cruel smile, then slammed the door shut behind him.

Vote

apter 256

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 259

Akia's POV

I waited. Five seconds, ten, then twenty. Only when I was certain they had moved away did I

straighten.

Cla

The frightened woman disappeared. The operative returned. I immediately undid the rope I was

bound with. I rubbed my wrists and flexed my fingers.

I examined the room. It was a luxury suite with a king-sized bed, a private sitting area, a bathroom, a balcony, floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking the ocean, expensive paintings, decorative vases, crystal lamps, and a bar stocked with enough alcohol to drown an entire pack.

There were cameras too. My eyes narrowed as I found them one by one: one hidden inside the smoke detector, another behind the television, one disguised as a small decorative ornament on the bookshelf, and a fourth embedded beneath the ceiling fixture.

There are four of them.

Five, Lydia corrected.

I looked toward the mirror. Her instincts were right. A tiny black dot was almost invisible near its

edge. Five.

I reached beneath my dress and pulled out the miniature jammer I had concealed there before the auction. It was barely larger than my palm. I activated it.

A soft pulse passed through the room. The cameras flickered, then went dark. I waited, and there

was nothing.

I smiled. "Sorry, gentlemen."

Just then, the door opened. I spun around. A man walked inside, tall, broad-shouldered, and dressed in an expensive black suit.

The moment he stepped inside, the scent of alcohol and dominance hit me. His wolf was strong. He was not an Alpha, but powerful enough to believe strength entitled him to whatever he wanted.

His gaze traveled over me. I said nothing. He glanced at the rope on the floor.

"Interesting," he murmured. He locked the door behind him. My muscles tightened.

Lydia rose inside me immediately. We need to act fast, Aria. He is obviously high up in Make good use of him.

TI

O

I know.

His smile widened. "It is good to know you are fierce. I paid a great deal of money for you."

I kept my expression blank. "You should have spent it on something worth keeping."

His face hardened. "You're going to learn some manners."

Claim

He stepped toward me. I stepped backward. It was not because I was afraid, but because I was measuring the distance and searching for possible weapons.

He reached for me. I moved. His hand closed around empty air. I drove my elbow into his ribs. He grunted. Before he could recover, I grabbed a decorative sculpture and slammed it against the

side of his head.

He staggered. I kicked the back of his knee. He crashed onto the carpet. He tried to rise, but I didn't give him the opportunity. I struck him again, this time with the base of a lamp. His body went

still.

I stood over him, breathing hard.

He deserved worse, Lydia snarled inside

my mind.

I checked his pulse. He was alive, just unconscious. Good enough. I dragged him behind the sofa

and quickly searched his pockets. There was a keycard, a phone, and an access badge.

I took all three, then stripped off the clothing I had been forced to wear for the auction and

changed into his spare shirt and trousers.

They were too large, but that was better than walking through the ship dressed like an auction. prize. I tied my hair back and slipped the access badge around my neck, then looked at myself in

the mirror.

For a second, the reflection didn't look like Aria Grayson. She looked like someone who belonged

here, someone dangerous. Someone who had walked into the heart of the enemy and intended to

walk back out.

Don't get yourself killed, Lydia said quietly.

I met my own eyes. I won't.

My jammer had bought me limited time. I needed to move. I slipped out of the suite. The corridor was empty. I walked calmly, resisting the urge to rush. Panic attracted attention, confidence

Every few seconds, I caught the scent of wolves: guards, workers, and buyers. Some were unaware of what the vessel really was, others weren't.

O

J

I descended one level using the access badge, and the atmosphere changed immediately. The

luxurious interior disappeared.

The walls became reinforced steel. Security doors replaced decorative entrances. Cameras appeared everywhere. I stopped.

This isn't just a cruise ship.

No, Lydia agreed. It's a fortress.

I activated the button on the tracker for communication. Noah's voice immediately came through

the encrypted connection. "Aria."

"I'm currently searching the vessel."

"I know," he said.

I frowned. "How did you know?"

"Because you just disabled half the ship's surveillance network."

I almost smiled. "You're welcome."

There was a pause. Then Noah's voice became serious. "Listen to me. I've been tracking the

vessel's signal since you were taken aboard."

“What did you find?”

O

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I descended some level using the access badge, and the atmosphere changed immediately. The

luxurious interior disappeared.

The walls blocked reinforced steel. Security doors replaced decorative entrances. Cameras

appeared everywhere. I stopped.

This isn't just a cruise ship.

Yes, Lydia agreed. It's a fortress.

I activated the bottom on the tracker for communication. Noah's voice immediately came through

the encrypted broadcast. “Aria.”

I'm currently searching the vessel.”

“I know,” he said.

frowned. “How did you know?”

“Because you just disabled half the ship's surveillance network.”

Liam smiled: “You're welcome.”

There was a pause. Then Noah's voice became serious. “Listen to me. I've been tracking the vessel's signal since you were taken aboard.”

“What did you find?”

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Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 260

Chapter 257 Aria's POV

"The ship isn't following a normal cruise route," Noah said.

I leaned against the wall. "Keep talking."

Clas

"It's moving between several coordinates that don't appear on commercial maritime routes. I've traced encrypted signals originating from the vessel."

Noah's voice dropped. "That ship is one of Silas' mobile bases."

I glanced toward the reinforced corridor and froze. "A mobile base?"

"It is more than that. It's functioning as an intelligence relay. Their encrypted communications are

being routed through it."

I looked around. Suddenly, every locked door felt different. Every guard, every camera, every

innocent-looking passenger.

This wasn't simply a floating auction house. It was a moving vault.

"How much information are we talking about?"

"I don't know yet."

"That's not an answer, Noah."

"I know." Noah paused, then said, "But whatever they're storing there, they've gone to extraordinary

lengths to protect it."

My pulse quickened.

This is it, Lydia whispered.

Yes. The Silas organization had spent years hiding behind shell companies, corrupt officials, rogue wolves, and disposable criminals. They had always been careful, but they had made one mistake. They had brought their secrets onto a vessel I could infiltrate.

I pushed away from the wall. "Can you access their network?"

"I'm trying."

"Try harder."

A faint laugh came through the line. "There's the Aria I know."

I rolled my eyes. "Focus, Noah."

O

laam. Aria..." His voice changed.

kisat?"

Bontunderestimate that place."

bokked down the corridor.

won't."

turned off the communication button.

Hem heard footsteps. Multiple sets. My body reacted before my mind did. I ducked into a maintenance alcove and pressed myself against the wall.

Free men passed, all wolves. One carried a tablet, another had an assault rifle concealed beneath his jacket, and the third was speaking quietly. "...transfer the files before we reach the northern

Vaterss.

Wyeyassmarcowed. I waited until they disappeared, then followed. Not too close, not too far.

he corridor eventually opened into a large security area. Two guards stood outside a reinforced door, a biometric scanner glowing beside it. I couldn't get through that.

pulled out the stolen phone I had gotten from the man who had bought me. I sent Noah a message. I told him I couldn't talk, not while in proximity to the guards.

A message from Noah appeared: I found something.

I typed quickly What?

A response came almost immediately: The ship's network has thousands of encrypted nodes. One is buried beneath the main deck.

I looked at the floor. Beneath me. How deep?

A response came a moment later: Unknown, but there's a separate power supply feeding it.

My heart thudded in the hidden server room. The core of the operation looked at the reinforced door, then at the quarters. A slow smile spread across my face.

You're thinking something reckless, Lydia said.

I'm thinking something necessary.

The same thing with you.

My hardware still talking. I waited. One

Chapter 257

forward.

Cle

My fist struck the first guard beneath the jaw. He dropped. The second reached for his weapon. I caught his wrist, twisted, and slammed him against the wall. His eyes flashed gold.

"Rogue b***h," he snarled.

My own eyes burned. Gold met gold. "I am not a rogue. Never forget that."

I drove my knee into his stomach. He folded, and I caught him before he hit the floor and lowered

him quietly.

Then I turned toward the biometric scanner. My stolen badge wouldn't be enough. I pulled out my

knife.

Now what? Lydia asked.

I stared at the scanner. We improvise.

I reached for the guard's hand. The scanner lit green. The reinforced door unlocked. My breath caught. Beyond it was a narrow staircase descending into darkness, cold air rushing upward.

Beneath it, I smelled something that made every instinct inside me sharpen. Wolves, dozens of them. Not passengers, not guards... prisoners.

My stomach dropped.

Aria... Lydia growled.

I know. I stepped onto the first stair. The door closed behind me.

Whatever Silas was hiding beneath this ship, I was going to find it.

Clar

A

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 261

Aria's POV

The staircase seemed to go on forever. Every level I descended made the air colder. The polished luxury of the upper decks had disappeared completely.

There were no chandeliers here, no expensive carpets, no smiling staff pretending this was an ordinary cruise. Only steel walls, reinforced doors, exposed pipes, the constant hum of machinery,

and wolves. I could smell them everywhere.

Guards patrolled the lower decks in coordinated groups, their footsteps echoing through the corridors, their scents overlapping until it was difficult to distinguish one from another.

We're getting closer, Lydia's voice was barely a whisper inside my mind.

To what?

The heart of this place.

I tightened my grip around the stolen access card. That was exactly what I was afraid of.

I moved through the corridors, keeping close to the walls and using every advantage the ship gave me. The internal structure was a maze, which worked in my favor.

I had studied the vessel's schematics before boarding it, but the actual ship was different. Some passages had been modified, others concealed behind false walls.

Still, the basic architecture remained. I knew where the service corridors were. I knew which areas carried electrical wiring. I knew where the cameras couldn't reach and, most importantly, I had the

jammer.

I activated it whenever I heard approaching footsteps, and the device emitted a faint pulse that made the cameras flicker and the communication signals weaken, stripping the guards of their surveillance advantage.

I slipped past the first patrol, then the second. The third nearly caught me. I was crossing a narrow corridor when I heard voices behind me.

"Check the lower section."

"I already searched it."

"Search it again. We have an intruder."

My heartbeat jumped.

M

O

They've made us out. Go left, Lydia's warning came instantly.

Clair

turned into a maintenance passage. Two seconds later, four guards stormed past the entrance. I pressed my back against the wall and held my breath.

One of them stopped, his head turning, his nostrils flaring as though he smelled me. It had been a long time since I had masked my scent. Could it be the effect of the scent-masking potion had

worn off?

My fingers tightened around the knife at my thigh.

If he comes in, we take him down, Lydia said.

Agreed, I answered.

The guard took one step toward the passage. Then his radio crackled. “Nothing on this level. Move

to the next section.”

He cursed and followed the others. I waited until their footsteps disappeared, then exhaled. That

was close.

You enjoyed it, Lydia chuckled.

I almost smiled. Maybe a little.

You’re impossible.

I continued downward. After several more minutes, I reached the lowest accessible deck. The air was different here. It was colder, and beneath the metallic scent of the ship, something else

lingered.

Something that made Lydia suddenly alert.

Do you smell that?

I stopped and inhaled slowly. At first, there was nothing. Then, I caught it. A familiar scent, faint and almost impossible to detect.

My brows pulled together. What is it?

Lydia didn’t answer immediately. I don’t know.

At the end of the corridor stood a door unlike the others. No handle, no keyhole, no ordinary access panel. Instead, there were three separate security systems: a biometric scanner, a retinal scanner, and an encrypted keypad. My mouth curved upward. "Now that's interesting."

I turned on the communication device. "Noah."

He answered immediately. "You're at the bottom."

"You can see me?"

"I can see the signal from your jammer. The ship's network is trying to isolate it."

"Then make yourself useful."

Claim

He laughed softly. "Good to hear you're still charming under pressure." His tone became serious. "Take the tracker close to the panel."

"Why is that?" I asked.

"It has a hidden camera embedded in it that activates with the communication device."

That's interesting, I thought. I did as instructed.

"Don't touch anything yet."

"You're taking too long."

"I'm hacking a system designed to keep an entire organization from being breached. Give me thirty. seconds."

"You have ten seconds."

"You're impossible."

I smiled. "That's what Lydia says."

I never said I liked being quoted, Lydia muttered. I almost laughed.

Then the keypad flashed red, yellow, green. The biometric scanner unlocked.

Noah's voice came through. "Open it."

I pushed the door. It slid aside silently. I stepped inside and froze.

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 262

Aria's POV

This wasn't a server room. It was an office. An exquisite one, with dark walnut walls, a massive

desk, leather chairs, a crystal chandelier, and a bar tucked discreetly into one corner.

Expensive artwork decorated the walls, and shelves contained what appeared to be antique

books. It looked like the private office of a powerful nobleman, not the command center of a

criminal organization.

I shut the door behind me. "Wow."

Noah was still connected. "What?"

"This isn't what I expected."

"What do you see?"

"A very expensive office."

"That tells me nothing, Aria."

"I know."

Clair

I moved toward the desk. My instincts immediately told me this wasn't a decorative workspace. There were documents everywhere, not random papers, but correspondence, contracts, reports,

names.

I picked up the first document. My eyes widened. The letterhead belonged to one of the oldest noble houses in the eastern territories. I read the first few lines, and my stomach tightened. "Silas has contacts among the nobility."

Noah went silent. "That isn't a surprise. How many?"

"I don't know yet."

I grabbed the phone in my possession and began photographing the documents, page after page.

There were letters between Silas' representatives and members of several territories' ruling families, discussions about shipments, political influence, pack movements, financial transfers, and security arrangements.

There was also something even worse: information about Alphas. Their weaknesses, alliances, rivalries, families, even their pups. Everything was documented.

supernatural hierarchy itself.

My jaw tightened. "These bastards have been watching everyone."

"Get everything you can," Noah said.

"I'm trying."

Clean

I moved to the computer. It was heavily encrypted. No ordinary login screen appeared/Instead the monitor displayed a black screen with a single symbol.

Noah inhaled sharply.

"What is it?"

"I recognize that encryption."

"From where?"

"Silas doesn't use it publicly," he replied.

I stared at the screen. "What does it mean?"

"It means you've found something important. Connect the USB device I gave you to the system. I

will take it from there."

I pulled the small device from inside my bra, where I had hidden it, and connected it to the computer. The device blinked.

“Done. Now what?”

“You wait.”

I hated that word. I stood there, watching Noah successfully hack into the system. Soon, the progress bar crawled across the screen. Twenty percent, thirty, forty.

Just then, I smelled a faint, familiar scent from the desk area. I stood completely still.

There was something about it. Something familiar. I had smelled it before, not on this ship, not in Silas’ territory, but somewhere else.

Somewhere that made my wolf restless. I closed my eyes and inhaled again. My pulse skipped. Silvermoon, Lydia’s voice came cautiously through my mind.

Yes. I knew that scent. I’d encountered it before, within Damon’s pack. My gaze swept across the office. “What connection does Silas have with Damon’s pack?”

That question haunted me. Silas had no obvious connection to Silvermoon, at least none that I

knew about, but if someone from Damon’s pack had been in this office, then either Silas had infiltrated Silvermoon, or someone from Silvermoon had been working with Silas.

Neither possibility sat well with me.

Claro

I turned back to the computer. The transfer bar was still moving. Eighty-seven percent. “Come on.

Hurry.”

Ninety-one. My fingers tightened around the edge of the desk. Ninety-four.

Then I heard footsteps. My entire body went rigid. Not one person, but several. Lydia surged forward, sharpening my hearing. Three wolves. I listened. One heartbeat was calm, almost unnaturally calm. Another was fast. The third... I knew that voice. My blood turned cold.

“Move the documents into the inner chamber. We don’t have much time left.”

Claudia. My eyes widened.

She’s here.

I know.

The footsteps approached. I looked around the office. There was nowhere obvious to hide. The windows were sealed, the door was too far away, and the desk sat directly in front of me.

Then I noticed something: a narrow gap beneath it. My eyes narrowed. I dropped to my knees and ran my fingers along the underside. There was a concealed latch there. I pulled it, and a section of the floor beneath the desk shifted.

A compartment. It was barely large enough for one person.

You're not seriously thinking about hiding in there, Lydia said.

Do you have a better idea?

Yes. Run.

You mean run into Claudia?

There was silence.

That's a fair point, Lydia sighed.

The computer beeped. Ninety-eight percent. The footsteps were almost at the door. TRANSFER COMPLETED. I yanked the data device free and shut down the computer.

I slipped the device beneath my clothing, then folded myself into the compartment. The space was so cramped that my knees pressed against my chest.

I pulled the panel closed above me, and darkness swallowed me. I barely had room to breathe.

Just then, the office door opened.

Clair

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 263

Claudia walked inside. I recognized her voice immediately.

"Where is it?"

Her heels struck the floor. Another person followed her.

“Everything is prepared,” a man said.

“That isn’t what I asked.”

“I said everything is prepared.”

Claudia slammed something onto the desk. I couldn’t see her, but I could hear every movement.

head. She began rifling through the documents, paper after paper shifting above my

My breathing became shallow. One wrong sound and she would find me.

Cla

Lydia pressed herself against my consciousness, perfectly still. Don’t move, Aria. We can’t afford to get caught.

I wasn’t planning to.

Claudia muttered something beneath her breath. “These should have been moved already.”

The papers were shuffled again.

“Silas wants the final list before the ceremony.”

My heart stopped. Ceremony? I remained completely still.

The man beside her spoke. “The preparations are almost complete.”

“Almost isn’t enough.” Claudia’s voice sharpened. “The sacrifice has to happen exactly as planned.”

My blood ran cold. Sacrifice. It was obvious Silas was preparing something monstrous. Now I had confirmation.

Claudia continued pacing. “Once the ritual begins, there will be no stopping it.”

The man hesitated. “And the captives?”

“They are all accounted for.”

My nails dug into my palms.

Lydia growled silently. She means the wolves below, the ones we smelled earlier.

I already knew that.

My mind raced. How many? Why were they being sacrificed? And for what?

Glaudia continued speaking. "The first phase is complete. The captives have already been collected. The final phase happens in three days."

My stomach twisted. Three days. We were running out of time.

Clair

Claudia stopped directly above me. I could hear her breathing. She took one step, then another

The desk creaked as she leaned against it. I froze.

If she opened the compartment, there would be no talking my way out of this.

Lydia's claws slid beneath my skin.

If she finds us, we attack immediately.

I know.

Claudia tapped her fingers against the desk.

"Something is wrong." The man stiffened.

"What is wrong?"

"Someone accessed the system."

My heart slammed against my ribs. The computer. Had Noah left something behind? How did they know we had accessed it?

Claudia's footsteps moved toward it. "There's a disruption in the network." She touched the keyboard. "Someone has been inside this room."

My throat tightened. The compartment suddenly felt even smaller.

Claudia turned. "Check the door logs."

The man immediately moved toward the security terminal.

“There’s no record of anyone entering.”

“Then someone bypassed the system.” She paused, her voice becoming quieter. “Find them.”

The man’s footsteps moved away. Claudia remained. I could hear her right above me.

Then she said something that made my blood run colder than anything else.

“Because if someone has discovered what we’re preparing, we need to kill them. If not, the entire

sacrifice will be useless.”

There was silence.

Then Claudia suddenly pulled open a drawer. The movement made the desk shift, and the compartment pressed against my shoulder.

It pressed down on the inside of my cheek to keep from making a sound. Claudia began searching through the drawer.

“Where is the final seal?”

The man answered from across the room. “Silas has it.

“Of course, he does.” Her voice dripped with irritation. She slammed the drawer shut. “Let’s proceed without it.”

She walked toward the door and opened it.

The door closed. Their footsteps faded. I didn’t move yet. I counted. Five seconds, ten, fifteen,

then twenty.

Clan

I had just reached the twentieth second when I heard movement outside. My body went rigid again. Claudia was returning. She walked into the office and started searching the entire place for

something.

I heard her search through the shelves, even the space behind the paintings. And now she was moving toward the desk, toward me.

Aria, she is coming in our direction, Lydia panicked.

My hand tightened around the knife concealed against my thigh. The compartment was too small. If Claudia opened it, there would be no room to fight properly.

I could break through the desk. I could shift. I could probably take her down. But not before making enough noise to alert every guard on this level.

Claudia's footsteps stopped right beside the desk. I heard her breathe. Then the chair scraped against the floor. She crouched. My heart slammed against my ribs. Her hand moved toward the underside of the desk.

She will open it now. Get ready, Lydia whispered.

I tensed.

Then the office door suddenly flew open.

"Claudia."

I froze. That voice was very familiar. Could it be him?

Claudia stood abruptly. "Joshua?"

♫

Clair

stopped breathing. For a moment, everything around me disappeared. Only that name remained.

Joshua. My brother.

Aria... Lydia's voice was uncertain. I smell him.

My heart nearly broke through my chest. My brother was on this ship.

The door remained open. I couldn't see through the narrow gap from where I was hidden, but I

could hear them.

Claudia's voice was sharp. "What are you doing here?"

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 264

Aria's POV

Joshua's footsteps crossed the room. Then came the answer, flat and emotionless.

"I was sent by Silas."

My stomach twisted at his words.

Claudia spoke again. "Silas sent you here?"

"Yes."

His voice was completely devoid of emotion.

Claudia walked around the desk. I pressed myself farther into the compartment. I could hear her footsteps approaching him.

"Did Silas tell you why he needed you?"

"Yes, he did."

"What did he say?"

"That the first-stage experiment requires a secondary sacrifice, and I will be used for it."

My blood ran cold. Silas wanted to sacrifice my brother?

Claudia didn't speak for several seconds. Then she asked quietly, "And you're willing?"

"I don't have a choice. I live to serve Silas."

My fingers curled into fists. The words secondary sacrifice echoed through my mind. I can't let my brother be used for any form of sacrifice.

Claudia continued. "It happens in three days."

"I am well aware."

Claudia walked away from the desk toward Joshua.

"Silas said the altar hasn't been fully prepared," she gloated. "The first-stage experiment will determine whether it can sustain the ritual."

I swallowed. My mind raced. This wasn't merely a sacrifice.

Claudia asked, “Do you know what happens if it succeeds?”

The answer came without hesitation. “I’ll be consumed.”

My entire body went numb. Consumed. Joshua, my brother, was apparently standing outside my hiding place, calmly discussing being sacrificed. I pressed my fist against my mouth. I couldn’t make a

< Chapter 261

Aria, Lydia’s voice trembled. We have to get him out.

Yes. We have to save him.

My eyes burned. I didn’t know whether I wanted to cry, scream, or tear this entire ship apart.

Claudia spoke again. “Do you understand what you’re agreeing to?”

“Yes, I do.”

“Once the altar is activated, there may be no way to reverse it, and if the experiment works, your life will be the energy source.”

“That’s what Silas wants. I live for Silas.”

I felt sick. Sick at the fact that Joshua was willing to lay down his life for Silas. Even though he had been brainwashed, why would he agree to such a thing?

Unless... unless his mind is being controlled by Silas.

Claudia suddenly moved toward the door. “We’ll discuss the rest later.”

Joshua stepped aside. “Where are you going?”

“To inform Silas that the final preparations are ready.” She paused, then added, “Don’t leave this level.”

“I won’t.”

The door opened. Claudia walked out. Her footsteps faded, and silence returned.

I remained hidden. Joshua stood only a few feet away. I could hear his heartbeat. My eyes filled with

tears.

I slowly pushed the compartment open. The panel shifted. Joshua turned, and our eyes met.

Everything inside me shattered upon seeing him.

Joshua stood beside the desk, watching me with a guarded expression.

“How did you get in here?”

“Joshua. It is me, your sister.” I stepped out of the compartment fully. “You know me.”

His eyes narrowed. “I’ve seen you before. You keep saying you’re my sister, but I have no sister. I don’t know why you keep doing that,” he said.

“Because you’re my brother.”

His jaw tightened “I’ve told you before. I’m not.”

I stared at him. This wasn’t our first encounter. It wasn’t even our second.

I had seen him twice since his supposed death. Twice, I had stood in front of the brother I thought forever, only for him to look at me as though I were a stranger.

“You don’t remember anything because Silas has brainwashed you. Please believe me,” I said softly

His expression hardened. “You’re wrong.”

“Am I?”

I stepped closer. He immediately stiffened.

I stopped. For a moment, neither of us spoke.

Lydia stirred inside me. He’s afraid and dangerous.

My chest tightened. He’s Joshua, I reminded her.

I looked at him again. “You used to call me Ari. You hated mushrooms.”

There was no reaction.

“You broke Dad’s antique clock when you were twelve and blamed it on me.”

His brow furrowed. Still nothing.

“You used to sneak into my room whenever I had nightmares. You’d sit beside my bed until I fell asleep. You’d tell me that monsters couldn’t get me because they would have to get through you first.”

His jaw clenched. “Stop.”

I froze. “Why?”

“Because I don’t remember any of that. I don’t know who you are.”

“But something in you does.”

His eyes flashed gold. “Don’t tell me what I remember.”

The force in his voice made me take a step back.

I swallowed. “You don’t have to believe me, but you’ve seen me two times since you came back.”

His expression shifted.

“Since I came back?”

“Since everyone believed you were dead.”

He stared at me. “I don’t remember being dead.”

“I know. That is because you weren’t. Someone made us believe you were dead just to use you for his purpose.”

“I don’t remember having any life before Silas.” His gaze hardened, and his voice became sharper. “Now, back to my question. What the hell are you doing here?”

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 265

Aria’s POV

My chest tightened. “We need to escape from here, Joshua. You are not yourself. My brother would never agree to sacrifice himself for an evil cause.”

His eyes flashed gold. “I am not your brother,” he snarled.

I took another step toward him, unafraid. Joshua immediately became defensive.

“Don’t come any closer.”

I stopped and forced myself to breathe. “Joshua, you are my brother. Dad misses you.”

His expression softened for the briefest moment, then the emptiness returned. “I don’t have a dad. I belong to Silas.”

The words cut deeper than they should have.

I clenched my jaw. “You don’t belong to anyone.”

“He gave me a purpose in life.”

I shook my head. “He took your life and caged you.”

Joshua’s expression hardened. “You don’t know anything about me.”

“I know you. I know the boy who used to steal food from the kitchen at midnight.”

His eyes flickered.

“I know the brother who taught me how to shift. I know the i***t who thought he could jump from the second-floor balcony because Dad wouldn’t let him leave the house.”

His brows pulled together.

“And I know the man who stood between me and a rogue wolf when I was sixteen.”

There was silence. His breathing became uneven,

“You keep saying things that don’t mean anything to me,” he snapped.

“They mean something to you.”

“No, they don’t.”

“Then why do you look at me like that?”

He didn’t answer. I wiped the tears gathering in my eyes. “Maybe you don’t remember me consciously. Maybe they buried everything so deeply that you can’t reach it.”

His expression remained guarded. “But I know you are still in there.”

“That’s enough. Stop.”

“I’m not going to stop,” I cried.

“Aria.”

My blood froze. He had said my name.

I stared at him. “Say that again.”

His expression changed, confusion crossing his face. “Aria.”

My heart slammed against my ribs. “How do you know my name?”

“I don’t know.”

“You do. You just said it.”

He shook his head, confused. “I don’t know why.”

“It is because you’re my brother.”

“I’m not. I’m a member of Silas’s organization.”

“You are Joshua Grayson.”

His expression became hostile. “Don’t call me that.”

“Why?”

“Because that’s not who I am.”

“It is.” I stepped closer. “Let me help you remember

He backed away. “Don’t touch me.”

“I have to.” I reached for his hand.

He jerked away. “Stay back.”

“No.” I grabbed his wrist. His eyes flashed gold, and a growl tore from his throat, but I held on.

I closed my eyes. My bloodline power stirred beneath my skin. Warmth spread through my palm. I pushed it toward him carefully, searching.

Memories weren't simply thoughts. For wolves of my bloodline, emotional memories could sometimes be reached through the blood. A scent, a feeling, a familiar heartbeat, a voice. Anything strong enough could become an anchor.

I focused on Joshua, on his childhood and the brother I remembered.

I pushed deeper. "Joshua."

His body jerked. His eyes widened. "What..."

I pushed harder. "Remember."

His breathing became uneven. A tear slipped down his cheek. I froze. He touched it as if he didn't understand what it was.

"I..." His voice broke. "remember..."

Hope exploded inside me. What do you remember?"

He looked at me. For the first time, his eyes weren't empty. They were frightened and confused, but alive.

"You're..."

A sharp alarm suddenly screamed through the room. Red lights flashed. My blood ran cold.

Lydia snarled. We've been exposed.

I released Joshua. The office door burst open. Claudia stormed inside, her eyes immediately landing on me, then on Joshua. Her face twisted with fury.

"You."

I stepped backward. Claudia's gaze narrowed. "How did you get out?"

I didn't answer. She smiled coldly. "It doesn't matter." She turned toward Joshua. "Kill her."

Joshua froze. I stared at him. "Joshua."

Claudia's voice hardened. "Prove your loyalty to Silas."

His eyes flashed. His body changed, not completely, just enough. His claws emerged, his fangs lengthened, and his wolf surged to the surface. He growled.

Lydia pushed forward inside me. Fight.

I raised my hands. "Joshua, look at me. You're fighting her command."

His jaw clenched.

Claudia smiled. "Kill her. Now."

Joshua took one step toward me. I stepped backward, "Joshua."

He took another step. His claws flexed.

"Please, fight this," I begged.

He lunged. I twisted aside. His claws sliced through the air where my throat had been. I struck his chest, and he staggered.

"Fight it!"

He roared, and the sound shook the room.

Claudia laughed. "Kill her, Joshua. For Silas!"

Joshua turned toward me. His eyes were wild. He charged. I barely blocked the blow. His strength

me backward, and my shoulder slammed against the wall. Pain shot through me.

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Lydia snarled. Let me out. He's going to kill us.

No. He's fighting it.

Joshua raised his hand. His claws hovered inches from my chest. Then he stopped. His entire body trembled. His face twisted in agony.

"Run..." The word was barely audible.

I stared at him. "What?"

"Run."

Claudia's expression changed. "What are you doing?"

Joshua's claws shook. "Get... away..."

Comments

Chapter 266

- *Chapter 263*
- *Aria's POV*
- *Joshua's eyes met mine. For a brief second, I saw him.*
- *Claudia screamed. "Kill her!"*
- *Joshua's body jerked forward. Then he stopped again. His wolf was fighting the command. I could see it. Every muscle in his body strained. Veins stood out along his neck, and his claws dug into his palms.*
- *"Fight it," I whispered.*
- *He looked at me. "I... can't. You need to leave."*
- *"Yes, you can. I am not leaving without you."*
- *Claudia's face twisted with rage. "Guards!"*
- *The doors opened. Several armed wolves rushed inside.*
- *"Fire!"*
- *My eyes widened. "Wait!"*
- *The guards raised their weapons. Joshua turned. He saw the barrels pointed at me. Something changed in his expression.*
- *"No!"*
- *He moved. I barely had time to understand what he was doing before Joshua threw himself between me and the guards.*
- *Gunfire exploded through the room. The sound was deafening. Joshua's body jerked violently.*
- *"Joshua!" I screamed.*
- *He staggered. Blood spread across his shirt. He looked down, then back at me, For one horrifying second, everything went silent.*

- *Despite being shot, Joshua grabbed my wrist and dragged me through the office doorway.*
- *The first gunshot cracked through the corridor behind us. I flinched. Joshua did not. Another shot tore through the wall where my head had been a second earlier.*
- *“Run, Aria.”*
- *“Joshua, you’re bleeding.”*
- *“i know.”*
- *Blood was already soaking through the side of his shirt. His breathing was uneven, but somehow he kept*
- *Chapter 263*
- *moving, pulling me deeper into the ship.*
- *Lydia was frantic inside me. He’s hurt. We have to protect him.*
- *I know. Lydia’s claws scraped against my mind, fighting for control. Let me out.*
- *Not yet. If I shifted inside the ship, there was no guarantee I would be able to control myself. More importantly, Joshua was barely keeping ahead of our pursuers. If I transformed, I might slow him down*
- *Another burst of gunfire echoed through the passage. Joshua shoved me around a corner.*
- *“Run faster.”*
- *We sprinted through the narrow internal passageways, our footsteps swallowed by the hum of the ship! engines.*
- *The walls seemed to close in around us. Pipes ran along the ceiling, vibrating with the power coursing through the vessel.*
- *I could hear them, our pursuers. Their boots thundered against the metal floor behind us.*
- *“Joshua,” I whispered, “where are we going?”*
- *“To the lower deck.”*

- *“That’s toward the cargo hold. Isn’t that a dead end?”*
- *“Not if we reach the maintenance passage.” He didn’t sound certain. That frightened me more than the gunfire.*
- *Joshua had always been the one who knew what to do. My brother had always been reckless, stubborn, and infuriatingly confident, but he had never sounded uncertain, until now.*
- *We reached another intersection. Joshua suddenly stopped. He pressed himself against the wall and pulled me against his chest. I covered my mouth as footsteps thundered past the other side of the*
- *passage.*
- *Three. No, four wolves. I could smell them.*
- *I listened carefully. The footsteps faded. Joshua waited another few seconds before moving. He leaned close to my ear. “Stay quiet.”*
- *I nodded. We continued, but this time, Joshua was slower. His hand kept drifting toward his wound.*
- *“You’re losing too much blood.”*
- *“I’m fine.”*
- *“You are absolutely not fine.”*
- *He shot me a look. “Still bossy.”*
- *A weak smile tugged at my lips. “You remember that?”*
- *His expression changed. For a moment, something painfully familiar flickered in his eyes. My brother. The*
- *Joshua I remembered. Then it disappeared*
- *He looked ahead. “We need to talk.”*
- *“Now?”*
- *“Now.” His voice was so serious that I stopped arguing.*
- *He led me into a narrow corridor that looked almost forgotten. There were no cameras that I could see no guards, only*

exposed pipes and emergency lights blinking along the walls. He checked both directions before turning to me.

- “How long has it been since you realized something was wrong with me?”*
- My throat tightened. “What do you mean?”*
- “I mean me.” He tapped his temple. “The memories.”*
- I stared at him. “What memories?”*
- Joshua swallowed. “I’ve been getting pieces of them back.”*
- Everything inside me went still. “What?”*
- He looked at me, and I saw fear in his eyes. Not fear for himself, but fear for me.*
- “I remembered you.”*
- My heart cracked. “Joshua...”*
- “I remembered Dad, and I remembered how I died.”*
- I stopped breathing. Lydia went silent. Even she seemed to understand the weight of those words.*
- I could barely force the question from my lips. “How?”*
- Joshua’s jaw tightened. “I started recovering fragments of my past memories a few weeks ago.”*
- My stomach dropped. “Then why did you pretend not to know me?”*

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 267

< Chapter 264

Aria’s POV

Joshua glanced toward the corridor. “The reason is because if they knew I’d remembered anything,

I'd never have been allowed to get near you."

His voice cracked. "I kept pretending to be loyal. I followed orders. I reported to Silas. acted like

every memory of my old life had been erased, but I was collecting information."

I shook my head slowly. "You were spying on them."

He nodded. "Yes, I was doing that for us."

My eyes filled with tears. "Why didn't you tell me?"

"Because I didn't know who I could trust." He looked at me. "Not even you."

The words hurt. I knew they shouldn't, but they did.

"You thought I'd betray you?"

"No." He stepped closer. "I thought they might use you to get to me. I couldn't risk letting them

know that I have regained part of my memories."

My chest tightened.

The sound of approaching footsteps made us both freeze. Joshua grabbed my hand. "We need to get going." He pulled me forward.

We started running again. This time, there was no hesitation, no plan, only instinct.

The corridor narrowed as we descended toward the lowest deck. My heart hammered against my

ribs.

Something is wrong. Lydia's warning came suddenly.

I slowed.

Joshua looked back. "What is it?"

"Wait."

He frowned. "Aria."

“I can smell them in front too.”

His face changed. “Yeah, me too.” Joshua swore. “They must have split up.”

KIKA

“Can we hide?”

“No.” He looked ahead, then behind us. His expression became grim. “Keep moving.”

We raced down the final staircase. The metal steps shook beneath our feet. Then we reached the lowest deck. I stopped.

There was nowhere to go. A solid steel wall stood in front of us. I turned. The corridor behind us had already filled with armed guards. At the other end, another group emerged from a side

passage.

We were surrounded.

Joshua slowly stepped in front of me. I grabbed his arm. “No.”

He looked over his shoulder. “Aria.” His eyes softened. “I need you to listen to me.”

“I am not leaving you.”

“You have to.”

The first guard raised his weapon. Joshua shoved me backward. “Go.”

“Where do I go?”

“Anywhere.”

I shook my head. “There is nowhere to go.”

His gaze flickered toward the wall behind me. “Maintenance hatch.”

I followed his eyes. A small metal panel sat near the floor. “Let’s go together.”

He shook his head. “It only opens from this side.”

I stared at him. “What?”

Joshua pulled a small access device from his pocket. “Once you’re through, it locks.”

“No, I won’t leave alone.”

“Aria.” He grabbed my shoulders. “Listen to me.”

The guards were getting closer.

“Joshua...”

“I have been waiting for this moment since I remembered who I was.” His voice became strangely

calm. “I knew there might come a time when pretending wouldn’t be enough.”

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<Chapter 264

I shook my head violently. “We can fight.”

“We can.” His eyes filled with tears. “But then they will catch both of us.”

I couldn’t answer. He leaned his forehead against mine.

For a moment, everything disappeared... the guards, the ship, the ritual, Claudia. There was only my brother. The brother I had mourned. The brother I had sperit so long believing was gone.

“I’m sorry,” he whispered.

I gripped his shirt. “You don’t get to apologize.”

“I should have come home. I should have protected you.”

“You should have.”

His lips trembled. “But I’m going to do it now.”

I couldn’t leave Joshua. He was my brother, the only family I had left besides my father, and I

refused to abandon him again.

The guards were upon us, and Joshua was ready to fight while protecting me and ordering me to

leave.

I ignored him.

Just then, I heard a low growl. Not from outside, but from inside me.

He's ours, Aria. Lydia snarled, her voice raw and ancient. No one takes what is ours.

There was something different in her voice. It had power, the kind that made my bones ache.

I stepped away from the metal panel. The air around me suddenly felt heavy. My heartbeat slowed, then one powerful beat thundered through my chest.

Boom.

A strange heat spread through my veins. I gasped. "What is happening?"

Lydia's eyes burned brighter than I had ever seen them. They hurt our family. They took Joshua from us. They tried to break us.

The heat intensified. My fingers curled, and even my vision blurred. "I can't control this."

You don't need to.

The next heartbeat felt like an explosion. Power erupted from my body. A shockwave tore the maintenance corridor. Metal screamed. The walls shook. The emergency lights shatt overhead.

Every muscle in my body tightened as something ancient surged through my blood.

It wasn't just Lydia. It was something more, something that had always been inside me. My

bloodline. The power from the land.

A roar exploded from my throat. Everyone turned in my direction.

"Aria, what are you doing? I told you to leave."

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 268

Aria's POV

My focus was on the guards. The first one raised his weapon. I looked at him. He froze. A second

later, the force surrounding me struck him. He flew backward.

Three others crashed into the opposite wall, their guns falling to the side.

I stared. I hadn't touched them.

More guards rushed toward us. I didn't think. I pulled a confused Joshua behind me and simply released the power. The corridor exploded with golden energy.

The werewolves were thrown off their feet. Weapons clattered across the floor. Some shifted instinctively, their claws scraping against metal as they tried to resist the force. They couldn't. None of them could.

I stood in the center of the chaos, still in my human form, breathing heavily. Then I heard a familiar voice.

Joshua looked at the bodies scattered around us, then back at me. "How did you do this, Aria?"

"I don't know."

Then I heard engines. Lydia's head snapped toward the sound. More of them are coming.

Joshua grabbed my hand and pulled me toward the ship's outer deck.

The wind hit me the moment we emerged. Cold ocean spray struck my face. The night stretched endlessly around us. There was only black water and no land in sight.

Behind us, alarms blared throughout the vessel.

"They'll be here any second," Joshua said.

I looked at the sea. "How far can you swim?"

Joshua gave me an incredulous look. "You're asking me that now?"

"We need to get off this ship."

"Aria..."

"We're werewolves." I pointed toward the water. "We can survive underwater for a long time."

He looked at the waves, then at me. “You go first.”

“No. I’m not letting you out of my sight again.”

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He sighed. “You are very stubborn.”

“It runs in the family.”

He gave me the smallest smile. Then we jumped together.

The ocean swallowed us. Cold water closed over my head. For one terrifying second, everything

went silent.

I kicked downward. My body adapted almost instantly. My wolf’s senses sharpened beneath the surface. The darkness no longer frightened me.

I could feel the movement of the water, hear the distant vibration of engines, and smell Joshua beside me.

I looked at him. He nodded. We swam fast. Our claws helped propel us through the water while our enhanced lungs allowed us to remain submerged far longer than normal.

I could feel the ship disappearing behind us.

A few minutes later, a new sound reached my ears. It was an engine. I turned.

A speedboat cut through the waves. A familiar voice shouted from it.

“Aria!”

My heart jumped. “Damon!”

The boat raced toward us. Damon stood at the front, his expression savage. Even from the water, I could feel his Alpha aura. Rhein was roaring inside him.

Damon jumped over the side before the boat had fully stopped. He hit the water and reached me within seconds. His hands closed around my waist. “Are you hurt?”

“I’m fine.”

His eyes immediately shifted to Joshua. Damon stared at him, then looked at me. “Has he regained his memory?”

I nodded. "Yes, he has."

"Welcome back, Joshua," he said.

Joshua nodded. "Thanks, Damon."

Damon didn't ask another question. Ho simak. —

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Damon turned. "What?"

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Justin pointed behind us. My stomach dropped. Another speedboat was approaching. It was fast.

My blood turned cold. A huge man stood at the front of the approaching boat. His eyes were fixed on us. I couldn't make out his face, just his huge body. He wore a mask over his face.

Joshua looked terrified upon seeing him. Could that be Silas? I wondered.

Justin accelerated. The boat surged forward. I grabbed the railing.

"Who is that?" I asked Joshua.

But to my shock, he was no longer beside me.

My heart stopped. "Joshua?"

I looked over the side. He was already in the water. He had jumped. "No!"

I rushed to the edge. "Joshua!"

He surfaced several meters behind us. I saw his face. He looked toward the approaching speedboat, then back at me.

I understood. He was going back.

"Stop the boat!"

Justin shook his head. "Ms. Aria, we can't."

"STOP THE BOAT!"

Damon grabbed my waist. “Aria!”

“Let me go!” I fought him. “Joshua!”

My brother turned and began swimming toward the enemy boat.

“Joshua, come back!” My voice shattered. He didn’t.

Silas’ boat changed direction. They followed him. Joshua had drawn them away. He was sacrificing himself again.

“No!” I reached toward him helplessly. The distance between us grew. His body became smaller and smaller. Then the darkness swallowed him.

“JOSHUA!” My scream tore through the night.

I tried to jump overboard. Damon held me tighter. “Aria, no!”

O

“LET ME GO!”

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 269

<Chapter 266

Akia’s POV

I couldn’t look at Damon. I kept staring into the darkness where Joshua had disappeared

Lydia whimpered inside me. We lost him.

I shook my head. “No.”

Aria...

“No.” My voice broke. “We didn’t lose him.” I pressed my trembling hand against my chest. “He’s

still alive.”

Lydia didn’t answer because neither of us knew if it was true.

The mate bond pulsed faintly between Damon and me. His arms tightened around my body, but

even his warmth couldn't reach the emptiness spreading through my chest.

Joshua had already sacrificed himself once, and now he had done it again. For me, for my freedom, for my life.

The weight of everything finally became too much. My body trembled violently as the adrenaline drained from my veins, leaving behind nothing but bone-deep exhaustion.

I tried to stay on my feet, tried to keep staring into the darkness as if Joshua might somehow return, but my vision began to blur.

"Aria?" Damon whispered.

I wanted to answer him, but my lips wouldn't move.

The last thing I felt was Damon's arms tightening around me as the world tilted beneath my feet.

Then, completely exhausted, I collapsed.

Darkness, that was all I remembered. Then pain found me. It started in my chest, spreading

through my ribs and down my limbs until every breath felt like it was tearing something apart.

I tried to scream. Nothing came out.

Aria. Lydia's voice drifted through the darkness. It was so weak that fear immediately clawed

through me.

Wake up.

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My eyes snapped open. White light flooded my vision. I gasped and immediately regretted it. Pain ripped through my chest. A groan escaped my throat.

“Easy.” Someone grabbed my shoulder. I flinched and instinctively tried to push them away

“Aria, it’s me.” That familiar voice reached me.

Damon. I turned my head. He was sitting beside my bed. His hair was disheveled, his clothes

wrinkled, and exhaustion had carved dark circles beneath his eyes.

He looked like he hadn’t slept. For some reason, seeing him made my chest hurt even more.

“Damon?”

His shoulders dropped in relief. “You were unconscious. You’re finally awake.”

I swallowed. My throat felt like sandpaper. “Where am I?”

“One of our safe houses.”

“How long have I been unconscious?”

He hesitated. “Twenty-four hours.”

Twenty-four hours. My memories returned in fragments. The ship, the guards, the ocean, my power. My brother, Joshua, disappearing beneath the darkness.

I jerked upright. “Joshua!”

Pain exploded through my body. Damon caught me before I could fall. “Don’t move.”

“Joshua!”

His arms tightened around me. “Aria.”

“He went back to them to protect me. He sacrificed himself for me.”

Damon’s expression softened. “We will find him and bring him back.”

Tears burned my eyes. “I was so close to having him back.” My voice cracked. “So close.”

My body began shaking. Damon pulled me carefully against him. I should have pushed him away.

Instead, I let myself lean against his chest. His heartbeat was steady beneath my ear. For one

moment, the world stopped spinning.

Damon's fingers brushed through my hair. "You need to rest."

"I don't need rest. I need to find my brother."

Just then, the door opened. The healer, Mira, entered carrying a wooden case.

Damon immediately stood. "She's awake."

The healer nodded. "I can see that." She approached my bed and placed two fingers against my

vist.

Her brow furrowed, "How do you feel?"

"I feel terrible."

"Any dizziness? Nausea? Or chest pain?"

I nodded. I was experiencing all of them at once, but the chest pain was horrible.

Mira exchanged a look with Damon. That immediately made me nervous. "What?"

She didn't answer. Instead, she placed both palms against my abdomen. Golden healing energy spread through my body. For a moment, warmth flooded my veins. Then it abruptly collapsed. Mira's expression darkened.

Damon noticed. "What happened?"

"The power is unstable."

I looked between them. "What power?"

"Your bloodline power."

I stared at my hands. The memory of the ship returned. The guards, the explosion of energy, the force that had erupted from me without warning.

Mira moved her hands to my chest. “You have overdrawn your bloodline core. Your power can’t stabilize on its own anymore. The resonance channels are fracturing.”

“Can you fix it?”

She hesitated. My stomach tightened. “Can you?”

“I can suppress it temporarily, but I personally cannot fix it.”

Her honesty frightened me. “What happens if it remains unfixed?”

She looked directly into my eyes. “If the bloodline remains unstable, every surge will cause more

damage.”

“How much damage?”

“At first, exhaustion, then internal bleeding, organ strain, and deterioration of the wolf bond, and eventually...”

Mira’s voice softened. “Your body will begin to reject the power entirely, and you will end up losing

your wolf. You may even lose your life.”

Lydia snarled. No, Aria. We can’t let that happen. Ask her to find a way.

I clenched my fists. “There has to be a way to fix it.”

“There is.” Mira’s words came quietly.

My heart lifted. “What is it?”

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Axia’s POV

Mira held my gaze as she spoke. "The only solution is bloodline resonance."

I frowned. "What is that?"

"It is a stabilization process between two compatible bloodlines." She looked at Damon. "Usually, it occurs naturally between fated mates."

Damon went completely still.

I lowered my gaze. "You're saying..."

"Your mate can anchor your bloodline."

Lydia stirred. Damon, he is our fated mate. We need him to survive.

I ignored her. "What happens if I don't have a mate?"

"Then the resonance is much harder to achieve."

"And if I do?"

Mira looked at me carefully. "Then the chances are significantly higher."

I already knew where this was going. Still, I asked. "How long do I have right now?"

Mira's expression became grave. "Not long. I am afraid you have less than forty-eight hours before you lose your wolf completely."

My stomach dropped. "Forty-eight hours?"

"Your power is consuming too much energy trying to stabilize itself." She placed a hand against my

shoulder. "If you don't complete the resonance soon, some of the damage may become irreversible."

I looked down. My hands were trembling. "So I have to choose someone."

"Yes, not just anyone. A compatible mate, or better still, your fated mate." She sighed. "You must

do this as soon as possible, Ms. Aria, if you want to survive."

The words settled over me like a death sentence. A mate. I had spent years avoiding the idea of depending on another person. Now my own bloodline was demanding exactly that.

Mira left after giving me several instructions. Damon remained. He stood by the window, staring

outside. Neither of us spoke.

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Finally, he turned. "You have to decide today, Aria."

Hooked at him. "I know."

+25 Pointe

His eyes met mine. The room became painfully quiet. The mate bond pulsed weakly between us.

He is all ours, Lydia said.

I closed my eyes. You don't get to decide that.

Don't be stubborn, Aria. He is the safest choice.

I stared at the ceiling. "You are really impossible, Lydia."

Lydia's voice softened. I am only saying the truth. He hasn't given us any reason not to trust him of late. He protects us. The bond already exists, and his wolf recognizes us.

My heart skipped. I looked toward Damon. He was watching me.

He walked towards me and stopped beside the bed. His eyes softened. "Please, Aria, you need to heed her instruction. I don't want anything to happen to you."

He reached for my hand. I let him. The instant our fingers touched, warmth moved through my

body.

Mira's words echoed in my head. Choose someone compatible.

I pulled my hand back. Damon let me.

"You don't have to choose me." He looked into my eyes. "You can choose any other person. As long as you live, I will be fine."

My heart twisted. “You are okay with me choosing someone else?”

Pain flickered across his face. But he nodded. “If that’s what you want, then I would understand. I’ll

still always protect you.”

That was Damon. Even when it hurt him, even when he had every reason to want me for himself,

still choose my life over his own happiness.

ly changed from how he was when we were married.

y hands. I thought about Noah. He cared about me. He had stood beside me

at their worst.

one of my mates by virtue of the altar at the Grayson land. One of the three I could rom, but sadly, I don’t have any romantic feelings towards him.

there is Ryder, who just has a natural way of making a woman desire him. But then there is

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still an unsolved mystery surrounding him.

Why had my mother betrothed me to him when we were still young? Until I solve that puzzle, I wouldn’t want to be bonded with him.

That leaves me with just Damon. A mate bond already exists between us. Our wolves recognized each other. Our bloodlines had already intertwined.

The safest choice was obvious. But choosing Damon meant more than survival. It meant opening/ a door I had spent years keeping locked.

I looked at him. “Damon.”

He waited.

“I choose you.”

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Aria's POV

Damon's fingers tightened around mine, and his gaze searched mine. "You're certain?"

I nodded. "I am only choosing you right now because I'm out of better options."

He remained silent.

"The prior bond gives us the highest success rate. That's the only reason."

He held my gaze for a long second. Then he nodded once, sharply.

"Then we do it tonight."

I mated with Damon that night and came back to myself in fragments by morning.

+25 Pors

I woke first to the weight of his arm draped across my waist. Then came the slow, steady thump of his heart against my spine.

Finally, I noticed the absence of pain. The jagged, tearing instability that had been gnawing through my bloodline for the longest time was simply... gone.

My power sat quiet and obedient inside me, like a blade finally sheathed.

Lydia stretched luxuriously in the back of my mind, a low, satisfied rumble rolling through our shared

consciousness.

We are stronger and steadier. He fixed us,

I know, I answered silently. Don't get used to it.

I slid out from under Damon's arm before he fully woke. The sheet whispered against my skin as I stood. My legs held. That alone felt like a miracle.

I found my clothes on the floor, pulled them on with efficient motions, and only then allowed myself to look at him.

Damon Hawthorne watched me from the bed, his golden eyes half-lidded. Rhein's presence still saturated the air. It was heavy, possessive, and reluctant to recede.

"You're stable," he said, his voice rough with sleep and something deeper.

"I am." I kept my tone flat and practical. "The resonance was successful. My control is back. Thank you."

He sat up slowly, his forearms resting on his knees. The mate bond between us pulsed once, warm and insistent, like it wanted to remind me it was still there. I ignored it.

"This was mutual aid," I continued before he could speak. "Nothing more. The same way I helped restore Rhein when he was fractured. You needed your wolf whole then. I needed my power anchored now. We both got what we required. There is no debt. No promise. No change in... whatever this is between us."

Silence stretched. Lydia paced restlessly.

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+25 Pounts

You're lying to him and to yourself. We shook, we loved every bit of what happened last night. We desire him

even more now.

I set my jaw. Stay out of this.

Damon's expression didn't soften. If anything, it sharpened.

"Mutual aid," he repeated, tasting the words like they offended him. "Is that the story you're going with?"

"It's the only story that matters." I met his gaze without flinching. "This was clearly tactical cooperation. We used what we had available. The prior bond made the soothing possible. That's all."

He rose in one fluid motion, crossing the space between us until the heat of him brushed my skin again.

Rhein's energy pressed against Lydia in a slow, claiming stroke that made my wolf lean into it despite my orders.

“You can call it whatever you need to in order to walk out of this room with your walls intact,” Damon said quietly. “But your wolf knows better, and so do I.”

I stepped back. The distance felt necessary.

“My wolf and I are not the same,” I answered. “And last night changes nothing about the arrangement we already have. Silas and Claudia are still moving. We have work to do.”

For a moment, I thought he might push. The Alpha in him wanted to. I saw it in the hard set of his mouth, the way his hands flexed at his sides.

Instead, he only inclined his head once.

“Fine,” he said. “Let’s focus on work for now.”

I left without looking back.

Only when the door shut behind me did I let the truth surface, cold and private.

I had been shaken, down to the bone. The way the bond had flared, the way my power had drunk him in like it had been starving, the terrifying rightness of it, none of that had been tactical.

But I would never say it out loud, not to Damon.

Lydia’s voice followed me down the corridor, soft and certain.

You can run from him, Aria, but you can’t run from us.

I kept walking anyway.

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Aria’s POV

+25 Punts

Later that day, Devin, Ryder, Noah, and I assembled in my study. Devin shared new intel he had gotten with us. “Silas isn’t waiting any longer.

I stared at the intelligence report spread across the table. Devin tapped the projected calendar. "The full moon is four days away. According to everything we've gathered, that's when he'll perform the final sacrifice."

My fingers curled against the edge of the table. "What about Joshua?"

Devin hesitated. "He is the sacrifice."

The room went silent. For a moment, I couldn't hear anything except the pounding of my heart. Joshua, my brother, would be sacrificed on the night of the full moon.

My throat tightened. The sacrifice was initially meant to take place in three days' time. Silas must have changed it because the secret leaked. Now, it was in four days.

We cannot let him do it. Lydia's voice rose inside my head, low and fierce.

We won't.

Devin exchanged a glance with Noah and me before adding, "Like I said days ago, Silas is very strong. Defeating him will be nearly impossible, but after the full moon, his power will begin to decline."

Noah cut in. "Won't the ritual already be complete by then?"

"It will," Devin said quietly.

My stomach twisted. "That means Joshua will already be gone, so rescuing him then wouldn't matter."

"No," Devin said quietly. "It won't."

I pushed away from the table. "Then we're rescuing him before the full moon."

Noah's expression hardened. "Aria, you understand what you're saying?"

"I understand perfectly."

"Silas is already very strong. The full moon will amplify his power, and if his ritual is already prepared," Noah stepped closer. "You could die."

I met his eyes. "So could Joshua."

His jaw tightened. For several seconds, neither of us spoke. Then Noah exhaled slowly. "I knew you were going to say that."

I almost smiled.

He's worried about you. Lydia's voice softened.

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I know.

He isn't the only one.

My chest tightened didn't need to ask who she meant. Damon. Even though he wasn't standing in the room, I could still feel the faint pull of our mate bond.

I pushed the thought aside. There would be time for Damon later. Right now, Joshua came first.

"Show me everything we have on Silas," I said.

Devin nodded and changed the projection. "We've been tracking his legitimate businesses for weeks. Most of them are clean on paper. Warehouses, transportation companies, private research facilities,

construction firms."

Ryder stepped forward. "But the distribution of his holdings doesn't make sense."

Noah crossed his arms. "We compared Silas's known assets with resources controlled by our families."

Ryder brought up another map. Red points appeared across the territory. "There."

I stared at the map. The points were everywhere. They were on different territories, different packs, different regions. But there was something strangely familiar about the pattern. "What am I looking at?"

"Underground facilities," Ryder said. "We believe Silas has been constructing altar replicas for bloodline experiments."

My eyes narrowed. "Altar replicas?"

"Yes."

Devin zoomed in. "He wants to make more altars like the one on Grayson land."

My stomach dropped.

"We also found out that the locations of the altar replicas overlap with rogue-wolf disappearances over the past decade," Noah said.

Silence filled the room. For the past decade, rogue wolves had disappeared across these territories. Some had been assumed dead. Others had simply vanished.

Nobody had been able to explain the pattern. Now we knew. Silas had been taking them and using them for experiments.

The rage inside me surged so visiently that my eyes burned. “Take me to one.”

Noah immediately shook his head. “Aria...”

“One of the smaller facilities.”

“That’s exactly what I’m objecting to.”

“I need to go. I need proof.” I looked around the room. “I need proof.”

Ryder nodded slowly. “One of the locations is not too far from the city. I can take you there.”

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Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

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Aria’s POV

The facility was buried beneath an abandoned industrial warehouse. From the outside, it looked dead. There was no movement, no guards, no signs of life. But I could sense wolf energy on the inside.

Lydia rose inside me. There are people inside,

I crouched near the entrance. “Yeah, I can sense them.”

Ryder shut his eyes, and when he opened them, he whispered, “I counted at least twelve guards patrolling on the inside.”

I flexed my fingers. “We can take them down, the five of us.” Noah and Ryder had each come with one of their men. I made them all promise not to tell Damon about this.

I didn’t want him finding out and trying to stop me from investigating.

Noah looked at me. “Stay behind me.”

I gave him a flat look. “No, I’m not hiding behind anyone.”

Before he could argue, I shifted. Bones cracked. My body transformed in seconds, silver-gray fur covering my skin in place of my clothes. Lydia surged forward. The cold night air struck my muzzle.

We charged inside. The first guard barely had time to turn before Lydia slammed into him. He hit the wall with a heavy thud. Another wolf lunged. I ducked beneath his claws and spun, driving my shoulder into his chest. He crashed into the floor.

Behind me, Noah and Ryder attacked the remaining guards. The corridor erupted into snarls and growls. Then a howl sounded from deeper inside. It was not a battle cry. It was a cry of pain.

I froze.

Aria. Lydia’s voice trembled. I smell blood.

I ran. The deeper I went, the stronger the smell became. It was the scent of blood, fear, and pain. Beneath it all was something ancient... magic.

I stopped before a massive iron door. Runes had been carved around its frame. My breath caught. I knew those symbols. They were almost identical to the runes beneath the Grayson land.

“No...” I stepped closer. My fingers hovered over the carvings. The moment I touched one, pain exploded through my hand. I jerked back.

Lydia snarled. It is just as they said. Silas is making replicas of the altar at Grayson land.

“Now you can see for yourself,” Noah said behind me.

I turned. He was staring at the runes.

Ryder moved beside him. “Silas has really been reproducing the ritual.”

My pulse quickened. I pushed the door open. The smell nearly knocked me backward. Inside were cages, dozens of them.

Werewolves were chained to the walls: Some were barely conscious, while others were covered in scars. Tubes ran from their arms into glass containers filled with dark red blood.

My heart shattered. “Oh, goddess.”

One of the wolves lifted his head. His eyes were dull. “Help...”

I ran toward him. “It’s okay. We’re getting you out.”

His gaze fixed on me. Then his entire body began trembling. “You’re...” He struggled to breathe. “You’re the

one.”

I froze. “The one what?”

“The awakening...”

Lydia growled. Ask him more about it.

I crouched beside him. “What do you mean?”

The wolf’s eyes filled with terror. “You are the one Silas is trying to recreate.”

My blood ran cold. “What?”

“The ritual...” He coughed. “He’s been taking wolves from old bloodlines. Drawing their blood. Mixing it with the ritual energy.”

Ryder’s face hardened. “For what purpose?”

The wolf looked at me. “To force another awakening.”

I stared at him. Suddenly, everything became clear. Silas wasn’t simply trying to kill me. He was trying to reproduce what had awakened inside me.

He had been conducting experiments across territories, sacrificing weaker bloodlines, studying their reactions, trying to discover a way to manufacture my power. And the full moon wasn’t merely about Joshua. It was the culmination. The final experiment.

My fists tightened. “Why now?”

The wolf swallowed. “Because he knows...” His voice cracked. “He knows you’re getting close.”

My heart stopped. “He knows you’re coming for him.”

Lydia snarled inside me. He’s afraid.

I looked at the altar carved into the far wall. The runes were incomplete. Some had been scratched out. Others had been rewritten.

Silas had been modifying the ritual. He had been testing it, failing and repeating it. And now he was rushing, probably because he was afraid I'd fully take control of the altar before he could finish.

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The pieces were finally falling into place. Silas wasn't simply racing against time. He was racing against

me

I looked back at the imprisoned wolves. "Free everyone."

Noah immediately moved. "Ryder."

"Already on it."

Chains snapped. Locks broke. Werewolves stumbled from their cages. Some collapsed. Others clung to each other.

I turned toward Noah. "We need more intelligence."

"From where?"

I already knew. "The head of my mother's house. If anyone knows the history behind these altars, my mother's family does."

Ryder frowned. "Do you trust them?"

I stared at the blood-covered altar. "No." The answer came easily. "But I trust what they know."

Whatever secret my mother's family had buried for generations, it was time to drag it into the light.

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Aria's POV

I went alone to my mother's family. That was the only condition I had given them. No Noah, no Ryder, no Damon, and no pack soldiers surrounding me.

If the head of my mother's house was willing to speak, I needed him to believe I had come without an

army.

Of course, I wasn't actually alone. Damon, Noah, and Ryder were somewhere beyond the estate's perimeter, hidden beneath the cover of the forest. They had argued against the plan for nearly an hour. Damon had been the worst.

"You expect me to stand outside while you walk into a house filled with people who may want you dead?"

I had looked him straight in the eye. "Yes."

His jaw had tightened. "Aria."

"You're not my shadow, Damon."

His eyes had flashed at my words.

Rhein had stirred through the bond, and I had felt his anger and fear bleeding through Damon. She shouldn't go alone.

This wasn't a mission where brute strength would solve everything. I needed answers, and I needed them from the one person who knew exactly what my mother's bloodline had been hiding.

The estate appeared ahead through the trees. The stone walls were cracked, the iron gates rusted, and weeds had swallowed most of the gardens. Yet there was something unnatural about the place.

My wolf felt it immediately... Magic.

I slowed. The closer I came, the heavier the pressure became against my skin. My mother's blood was reacting to the land. The estate knew who I was.

I stopped before the gate. Two guards emerged from the shadows. Neither looked surprised to see me. One stepped forward.

"State your name."

I stared at him. "I am Aria Grayson. This is my late mother's family estate."

His eyes narrowed. "Prove that you are who you say you are."

I inhaled slowly. Then I released the smallest portion of my power. The air changed. A pulse of silver energy rolled from my body. The guards staggered backward. Their wolves immediately bowed inside them. One dropped to a knee.

"The blood..."

The other stared at me in disbelief. "It's her."

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walked through the gate. "Take me to the head of the house." Neither dared stop me.

The moment I entered the main hall, I knew he had been expecting me. The head of my mother's family sat at the far end of the room. He was an older man with silver hair and sharp eyes. He didn't rise. He didn't even look surprised.

"Aria Grayson."

My footsteps stopped. "You knew I was coming."

A faint smile touched his lips. "I could sense the power in your blood from a mile away."

Something inside me tightened. He gestured toward the chair opposite him. "Sit."

I remained standin

His smile disa

I said not

My fin

ome here to exchange pleasantries.

ou came because you finally discovered what your bloodline means."

eled over me. "Your mother abandoned this house."

eft because she wanted a life outside your control."

oice sharpened. "And her defection cost this house everything."

So this is about revenge?"

responsibility.” He leaned forward. “Your mother was the heir. When she left, the burden
the ancient energy beneath the estate pulse. The head of the house continued. “You have
awakened bloodline power. That makes you the rightful heir.”

“Apparently your solution is to hand me over to an altar.”

“Not hand you over.” His eyes gleamed. “Activate it through you.”

My stomach twisted. I stepped closer. “You must have known about Silas and what he was
doing to rogue wolves.”

His expression remained emotionless. “I know about him, and I must say his methods are
unpleasant.”

“Unpleasant?”

Lydia snarled. Let m

“He’s draining

The man

My cl

hem, and you call that unpleasant?”

er Joshua.”

His expression changed slightly. There was fear in his eyes, not for Joshua but for himself.

I smiled without humor. “You do know where he is.”

He leaned back. “You misunderstand your position.”

“No.” I released my power. The entire room shook. A silver wave exploded from my body.
The man’s chair slammed backward. He barely had time to react before invisible pressure
crushed him against the wall.

His eyes widened. “What are you doing?”

I walked toward him. “Making you understand my position.”

His wolf roared inside him, but my bloodline power overwhelmed it. His knees buckled.
He couldn’t move.

I stopped inches from him. “Tell me where Silas is.”

He gritted his teeth. “You think this makes you powerful?”

“I know it does.” I increased the pressure. The wall behind him cracked.

He gasped. “Where is Silas?”

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Aria’s POV

“You’ll destroy yourself, Aria. He will kill you,” he snarled.

“Maybe.” I leaned closer. “But you’ll die before I do if you keep wasting my time.”

His face twisted with rage. Then a strange smile appeared. “You have your mother’s eyes and her arrogance.”

I tightened my grip on my power. “Enough. Answer my question!”

His breathing became strained. “I don’t know where exactly he is at the moment, but I know where he will be in three days’ time.”

I maintained my grip on my power. “Keep talking.”

“Three days from now.” He looked directly at me. “Silas will perform a large-scale sacrifice at a designated location.”

My pulse thundered. “Where?”

He smiled. “You probably think it will be on Grayson land, but that is not the case. He already has replicas in different locations.”

I slammed him harder against the wall. “Where will it be?”

He finally gave me the location. It was a remote territory beyond the northern border. My mind immediately began calculating distances. Three days until the ritual. Three days until Joshua became a secondary sacrifice.

I released him. He collapsed onto the floor, coughing. The air outside suddenly felt heavier. I turned toward the window. I could feel Damon through the mate bond. He was close.

He heard everything, Lydia said.

Probably.

The head of the house followed my gaze. Then he laughed.

I looked back. "What?"

His eyes moved toward the window. "Damon Hawthorne."

My expression hardened. "You know he is around?"

"Of course. I might not be as strong as I used to be, but I can still sense energies." He wiped blood from the corner of his mouth. "Your little group of three Alphas has been terribly obvious."

A chill ran through me.

He smiled and pushed himself upright. "Do you really believe the Alpha of the Silvermoon Pack and the

I didn't answer.

"You cannot." His voice became strangely calm. "Silas has spent years preparing himself for this sacrifice."

I stared at him. "Then I'll spend the next three days preparing for him."

I turned toward the door.

"Wait."

I stopped. His voice carried a strange amusement. "Honestly, Aria... I need you to understand that no matter how hard you try, you cannot defeat Silas."

My expression hardened. I looked back. "Watch me."

He glanced toward the window again. This time, his smile became almost peaceful. "I'd like to see it."

I frowned. "See what?"

“You and Silas destroy each other.”

His laughter followed me as I walked away.

Three days, that was all the time we had. Three days until Silas began the sacrifice. Three days until Joshua’s life was extinguished for good. Three days until I walked into a battle I might not walk out of.

I knew that last part. I had accepted it. At least, I was trying to.

The first thing I did the following morning was enter the training grounds. The air was cold against my skin as I stood barefoot in the center of the clearing.

Around me, the ancient trees swayed beneath the morning wind, their leaves rustling like whispers.

Lydia paced restlessly inside me. Do it again, Aria.

I inhaled. Silver energy surged through my veins. The ground beneath my feet trembled. I raised both hands. Power erupted from my palms and struck the training stones ahead.

Boom!

The largest stone cracked down the middle. I lowered my hands. My breathing was heavy.

Again. Lydia growled approvingly. Harder this time.

I clenched my jaw. Another wave of power burst from me. This time, three stones shattered. I staggered backward. Damon caught me before I fell.

“That’s enough.”

I pulled my arm from his grip. “No, it isn’t.”

His eyes darkened. “Aria, you are pushing yourself too hard. You have been out here training for three

hours.”

I turned toward him. “Joshua has three days. I intend to bring him home, and I need to get strong enough

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to do it.”

Damon stared at me for several seconds.

Rhein stirred through the bond. She's pushing too hard.

I felt the wolf's concern through Damon. Lydia immediately answered. And you're going to stop her?

Rhein growled. I'm going to keep her alive.

Despite everything, a faint smile tugged at my lips.

I continued training, and by afternoon, my body felt like it had been torn apart. My muscles ached. My veins burned. Even Lydia had gone quiet, but the power inside me was stronger. It was more controlled. That was what I needed.

The bloodline power wasn't simply raw strength. It was ancient. It responded to emotion. Fear made it unstable. Rage made it destructive. But control... control made it deadly.

I stood before the largest training stone and closed my eyes.

Don't fight it, Lydia whispered. Guide it.

I breathed slowly. I felt the magic moving through my veins. It wasn't foreign anymore. It felt like something that had always been inside me. Something inherited and awakened.

I opened my eyes. The stone exploded.

Damon watched from several feet away. He nodded proudly. "You finally outdid yourself."

I wiped sweat from my forehead.

Lydia purred. We're ready.

I wasn't sure if she meant the training or the war. Maybe both.

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Aria's POV

That evening, I took Elona to Walter. This was the only place i knew her safety would be guaranteed when I was away. My daughter jogged excitedly as we walked through the hallway to meet her great-grandfather in his study.

The thought of leaving her made something inside my chest ache.

Lydia whimpered. Don't think about it.

I closed my eyes. I have to. What if we don't come back?

Lydia went silent. She didn't have an answer. Neither did I.

I took Elona into Walter's study. The former Alpha was sitting near the fireplace. His eyes immediately softened when he saw her.

"Come here, little one."

Elona ran into his arms. Walter chuckled as he lifted her. I watched them, memorizing the sight. The way she smiled. The way Walter held her. The way the firelight reflected in her eyes. I knew I was making the right decision.

Walter looked at me. "You've made up your mind."

I nodded. "Yes."

He studied my face and smiled warmly. "We will be here waiting for you to return."

I swallowed and returned his smile. The truth was, I didn't know if I would return, but that was not something I would want to say in front of my daughter.

Elona looked at me and then at her great-grandfather. "Mommy will only be away for a few days." She smiled beautifully at me.

My heart ached at her words, but I forced a smile. "That is correct, sweetheart." I spread my arms. "Now come and say goodbye to Mommy."

Elona came down from her great-grandfather's lap and rushed towards me.

She wrapped her little arms around my neck. "I'll miss you, Mommy."

My eyes burned. "I know. I will miss you too."

I kissed her forehead. Then I whispered against her hair. "Be brave for Mommy and be a good girl to great-grandpa."

She nodded solemnly, "I will."

I stood. Walter looked at me. He gave Elona some toys to play with and asked one of the handmaidens to watch over her while he saw me off.

When it was finally time for us to part ways, I smiled at him and bade him farewell.

“Aria, my child. You don’t have to say goodbye as if you’re already dead.”

“I know.”

“Then please be brave. I know you are scared right now, but you will conquer this. I have faith in you.”

I smiled faintly. “Thank you, Grandpa.”

His expression softened. “Also, don’t worry about Elona. I’ll keep her safe.”

“I know.”

He nodded. “And when you return, she’ll be waiting for you.”

I looked towards the house one last time. We have to come back.

Lydia’s voice was firm. We definitely will.

I allowed myself to believe it.

When I returned to the training grounds, I found the rogue wolves waiting. Dozens of them. They stood together beneath the moonlight.

One of the older wolves stepped forward. “We heard you’re leaving in two days.”

I nodded. “Yes, I am.”

“We’re coming too.”

My eyes widened. “No.”

Garrick spoke next. “You gave us a place to belong, Ms. Aria.”

“You gave us food and shelter,” another wolf said.

A female wolf spoke next. “You treated us like wolves instead of monsters.”

My throat tightened. “I don’t need you to die for me.”

The old wolf shook his head. “We’re not dying for you.” He looked around at the others. “We’re fighting for the pack.”

Silence settled. Then dozens of wolves lowered their heads. One by one, they shifted. The clearing filled with the sounds of cracking bones and snarling wolves.

Only Garrick remained standing beside me.

Lydia rose proudly inside me. They’ve chosen to fight beside us.

I looked at Garrick. “You guys don’t have to do this.”

He stared directly at me. “We know, but we want to do this, for our new pack.” His voice was rough. “Before you, we were rogues.” He pointed towards the others. “Now we have our dignity, a place to call home, and a reason to fight.”

Chapter 273-

+25 Paints

Lewallowed. “Then we’re going to make sure everyone understands exactly what kind of pack they’re dealing with.”

A howl erupted from the group. Then another. Soon the entire clearing shook with their voices.

The old wolves took control of the preparations immediately. They divided everyone into squads. Trackers, scouts, close-range fighters, long-range attackers, and healers.

Each wolf was assigned according to their strengths.

Then Noah arrived. Several vehicles rolled into the clearing. He stepped out. Behind him, men unloaded long crates.

Ryder opened the first one. Weapons filled the container. Silver-edged blades, reinforced claws, specialized darts, chains designed to restrain enhanced werewolves, and several weapons covered in strange runes.

I stared at them. “What are those?”

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 277

Aria's POV

Noah picked one up. "Something Silas won't expect."

+25 Points 2

He handed it to me. The moment my fingers touched the weapon, my bloodline power reacted. The runes glowed faintly.

I raised my eyebrows. "You made these?"

"No." Noah's mouth curved slightly. "I had them made."

"By whom?"

"Someone who doesn't like Silas very much."

I examined the blade. "What do they do?"

"They disrupt magical barriers, just in case any are put in place on that day."

I smiled.

Ryder opened another crate. "These are designed to weaken Silas's guards and help our men fight them better."

I looked at Noah. "You prepared for everything."

His expression became serious. "I've been preparing for Silas for years. These weapons won't guarantee victory."

I nodded. I looked at him directly. "That's right, but they'll give us a chance."

"That's right," Ryder agreed.

I tightened my grip around the blade. A chance. That was all we needed.

The night of the full moon soon arrived.

Tonight was the night. Tonight, Silas would complete his ritual. Tonight, Joshua would die if we failed.

I crouched behind a cluster of rocks overlooking the narrow entrance to the cavern. My breathing was slow and controlled.

Around me, the rogue wolves waited in silence like warriors.

Noah and Ryder were positioned farther west with their fighters, while Damon's elite wolves had taken the eastern perimeter.

Damon himself stood beside me. His presence was a steady warmth against the cold night.

I glanced at him. "Is everyone in position?"

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He nodded, "Yes, every one of them. There has been no movement from Silas's guards."

I looked toward the cavern entrance. It was barely wide enough for two wolves to enter side by side. Beyond it was darkness. But I could smell something beneath the earth. Blood, magic, and death.

Lydia sniffed the air. The ritual is about to start.

A shiver ran through me. The cavern had been carved into the mountain itself. According to our scouts, the interior opened into a massive underground chamber, and at its center stood an altar, a replica of the one at Grayson land.

Silas had built it just as he had many others, to mimic the ancient altar as closely as possible, and tonight, he intended to force it awake.

I looked at the narrow entrance again. "Once we're inside, there won't be much room for retreat."

Damon's gaze remained fixed ahead. "We aren't retreating." His eyes met mine. "I will protect you with everything I have."

The mate bond pulsed between us. Warm and deep. I looked away.

How romantic. Lydia practically purred.

I ignored her. Damon touched my wrist. "Come."

I followed him farther from the others. He stopped beneath an ancient tree. Moonlight spilled across his face. Something about his expression made my heart tighten.

"What is it?"

He didn't answer immediately. Instead, he reached beneath his shirt and pulled out a thin silver chain. A small wolf fang hung from it.

I stared at it. "What is that?"

“It belongs to my family.”

I looked up. Damon closed his fingers around the pendant. “It was passed down through the Hawthorne Alphas.” His voice was low. “My grandfather gave it to me when I became Alpha.”

I touched the fang. “It’s beautiful.”

“It’s more than that.” He stepped closer. “Among the oldest werewolf clans, an Alpha could make a blood oath before battle.”

My heartbeat quickened. “To whom?”

“To his mate.”

I froze. Damon drew a small ceremonial blade. My eyes widened. “Damon...”

“Let me finish.”

He turned his palm upward and drew the blade lightly across it. A thin line of blood appeared. He extended his hand toward me.

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I stared at him. “You’re serious.”

“Completely.”

He took my hand and gently turned my palm upward. Before I could object, he made a shallow cut across it. Our blood touched. The mate bond exploded. Power surged through my body. I gasped.

Lydia howled inside me. Damon’s eyes flashed gold. Rhein rose beneath his skin. Damon pressed our bleeding palms together. Then he spoke.

“I, Damon Hawthorne, Alpha of the Silvermoon Pack, stand before the Moon Goddess and before my mate. I swear that I will protect Aria Grayson with my life.”

My throat tightened.

“I will stand between her and death.” His fingers tightened around mine. “I will fight beside her when she fights.” He looked directly into my eyes. “And if death demands a sacrifice tonight, I will give myself before I allow it to take her.”

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 278

Aria's POV

My breath caught. "Damon..

He didn't stop. "I make this oath freely. make it with my blood." His eyes softened. "And I make it with the bond that the Moon Goddess placed between us."

The mate bond burned. My vision blurred. I blinked quickly. I didn't want him to see me cry. But Damon lifted his free hand and brushed his thumb beneath my eye.

"Don't cry."

I shook my head. "You shouldn't make promises like that."

"Why?"

"Because you might have to keep them."

His expression became serious again. "I intend to do so."

I stared at him. "You could die, and I don't want you to."

His forehead rested against mine. For a moment, the war disappeared. There was only us.

I whispered, "I don't want you to sacrifice yourself for me."

His eyes held mine. "If the choice comes down to you or me..." He squeezed my hand. "I would gladly give myself."

"No." My voice cracked. "You don't get to decide that. We will fight together, and we will both make it back

alive. Promise me."

Something softened in his expression. "I promise."

Lydia whispered inside me, That's the spirit. No one needs to die.

“Let’s do this,” I said.

Damon nodded.

I raised the intercom Noah and Ryder were using. “Noah, Ryder, we’re moving in now. Take control of the eastern and western perimeters. Once you’re done, join us. Damon and I will handle the cavern.”

“Copy that,” they both said in unison.

I turned to the rogue wolves and the rest of the men waiting behind us. “It’s time, guys. Let’s go.”

I exchanged a glance with Damon. He nodded.

We charged into the cavern.

The moment we were spotted, movement erupted among the trees. Dark figures emerged from the

shadows, dozens of them. Silas’s wolves. Their eyes glowed beneath the moonlight, and the stench of blood and dark magic flooded the air.

They charged toward us in a vicious wave.

My bloodline power surged beneath my skin. Silver light spread across my arms, pulsing with each beat of my heart.

Behind me, the rogue wolves shifted. Bones cracked and muscles twisted as their forms changed. Growls rolled through the forest.

Damon shifted beside me.

His body transformed into a massive black wolf. Rhein. His silver eyes locked onto mine.

Stay close.

I felt his voice inside my mind. I will.

My own transformation followed. Pain flashed through my body as my bones shifted and fur erupted across my skin. Lydia surged forward, and the world changed.

Every scent became sharper. Every heartbeat became louder. Every movement became clearer.

I lowered my body, claws digging into the earth as Lydia bared her teeth. Let's bring your brother home.

I looked at the wolves surrounding me, my allies. Then I turned toward the enemy advancing through the trees.

The full moon hung directly overhead.

The ritual had begun.

growled, and the cavern erupted into war. Claws tore through flesh. Fangs snapped. The cries of wounded wolves echoed against the stone walls as our forces crashed into Silas's guards.

But beneath the violence, something else was happening. The altar was waking.

I could feel it. Ancient energy pulsed beneath my feet, crawling through the runes carved into the stone. The replica altar at the center of the cavern glowed crimson.

"No!"

I launched myself toward it. A guard intercepted me. I slammed into him, sending both of us rolling across the stone floor. Before he could recover, I drove my claws into his shoulder and threw him aside.

I scrambled upright. The altar pulsed again, then the glow suddenly died. A violent shockwave rippled through the cavern. Every rune went dark. The guards stumbled. Some collapsed. Others stared at the altar in confusion.

I stared too. We had done it. The ambush had worked. The altar wasn't activating.

Lydia surged excitedly inside me. We stopped it.

I almost allowed myself to breathe as I transformed back into my human form. Then a slow clap echoed

through the cavern.

Clap. Clap. Clap.

My blood turned cold. Everyone froze. A figure stepped from the shadows behind the altar.

It was Claudia.

She looked nothing like the woman I knew. She was different: Her eyes were glowing an unnatural violet. Dark veins ran along her neck, pulsing with energy.

The air around her seemed to distort. I could feel her power from where I stood, and it wasn't just wolf power. There was something else I couldn't quite put a finger on.

Lydia's hackles rose. That's not natural.

I swallowed. I know.

Claudia smiled. "You really thought that would be enough?"

Damon growled beside me, his black wolf body lowering into an attack stance. Rhein growled. Something is wrong with her.

I already knew.

Claudia raised one hand. A wave of dark energy exploded outward. Rogue wolves were thrown across the cavern. Several slammed into the walls.

Damon dug his claws into the stone to keep from being pushed back. I barely managed to remain standing. My heart pounded.

Claudia laughed. "Did you really think Silas would send me into this battle without preparing me?"

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Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 279

Aria's POV

I stared at Claudia. "What did he do to you?"

She smiled wider. "He gave me power. Her aura expanded. The energy around her was almost suffocating. "Power beyond the limitations of wolfkind.""

Lydia snarled. He must have given her some of his powers.

Claudia's eyes flashed as she continued. "He gave me the kind of power none of you would be able to comprehend."

I clenched my fists. "You're nothing but his weapon."

Her expression darkened. "And you're still his greatest obstacle."

She lifted her hand. A dark bolt shot toward me. I jumped aside. The stone behind me exploded. I rolled across the floor and came up on one knee.

Claudia was already there. Her claws slashed toward my face. I blocked them. The impact sent pain shooting through my arms. She was strong, far stronger than before.

I twisted and drove my elbow into her ribs. She barely moved.

Lydia gasped. She is even stronger than I imagined.

Claudia laughed. "You must be jealous of my newfound strength."

"Jealous?" I scoffed. "I feel sorry for you."

Her smile vanished. She swung, and I blocked. Her claws scraped across my forearm. Pain burned through me. I kicked her backward. She skidded across the stone.

Then she smiled. "You should worry about yourself."

The cavern suddenly went silent. I heard a scream from somewhere within the cavern. My heart stopped. I knew that voice.

"Joshua."

I turned in that direction.

Claudia smiled. "Yes."

My entire body went cold. She pointed toward a massive iron door at the end of the cavern. Behind it, I could feel him. My brother, barely alive.

"I brought him here under Silas's command," Claudia said.

I stared at the door. "Let him go."

"Of course." Her smile became cruel. "Trade yourself for him."

Chapter 276~

Damon stepped forward. "No, don't listen to her, Aria."

Claudia's eyes flicked toward him. "You don't get a say, Alpha."

Damon's growl shook the cavern. "Try me."

Claudia laughed. Then she snapped her fingers. The iron door opened. Two guards dragged Joshua into the chamber. My breath caught.

His body was covered in wounds. Chains wrapped around his wrists and ankles. His head hung forward.

"Joshua!"

I took a step. He lifted his head weakly. His eyes found mine. "Aria..."

My heart shattered. I almost ran toward him.

Lydia stopped me. Stay where you are, Aria. It is a trap.

I froze. Claudia smiled. "If you take one step closer, they will kill him."

I looked at the guards. Their claws pressed against Joshua's throat. My blood turned to ice.

"Don't."

Claudia's expression was triumphant. "Then listen." She pointed at me. "You can swap yourself for him." Then she pointed toward Joshua and spread her arms. "One life for another."

I bit my lower lip as I thought of what to do.

Her eyes narrowed. "You don't have a choice."

"I always have a choice."

"Do you?" She nodded toward Joshua. One guard pressed a claw deeper against his neck. A thin line of blood appeared. I stopped breathing.

"Aria..." Joshua's voice was weak. "I am scared..." His eyes met mine. "I don't want to die."

Tears burned my eyes. "You won't die, Joshua. I'm not leaving you." My voice broke. "I already lost you once. I can't do it again."

Joshua shook his head. "Please save me, Aria."

Something inside my chest cracked. "I will. I promise."

Lydia whimpered. We can save him.

I quickly assessed the battlefield. The rogue wolf vanguard had already attempted to reach Joshua. They charged from the flank. Claudia's guards intercepted them, pinning them to the ground.

"Hold the line!" one of the older rogue wolves shouted.

The wolves fought desperately, but Claudia's forces were overwhelming them. I couldn't let this continue. I exchanged a knowing look with Damon.

Then I turned back to Claudia. "You've made a mistake."

Her eyebrows rose. "Have I?"

"You brought Joshua into the open."

Her smile faded. "How exactly is that supposed to be a mistake?"

I attacked. She barely raised her arm before my claws collided with hers. The impact shook the cavern. I spun. She followed. Our claws met again. She was fast.

I ducked. Her claws sliced through the air above my head. I drove my knee into her stomach. She stumbled. I grabbed her wrist and twisted. She snarled.

Dark energy exploded from her palm. I was thrown backward. My body slammed against the stone wall. Pain shot through my spine. I dropped to one knee.

Claudia approached slowly. "You cannot beat me."

I wiped blood from my mouth. "Maybe." I rose. "But I don't need to."

Her eyes narrowed. "What?"

I smiled. "I'm only keeping you occupied."

Her expression changed. She looked toward Joshua. It was too late.

Damon had taken down both men holding him hostage and was currently fighting off more of Silas's men who had charged toward him.

A howl erupted from the western side of the cavern. It was Noah. Another howl followed. Ryder's squad had arrived.

They helped the rogue wolves fight off Silas's men holding them hostage and urged them forward.

Some of them also helped Damon fight off the men trying to get to Joshua. Joshua had now fallen to his

knees.

I moved. Claudia realized what was happening.

“Stop them!” She lunged toward Joshua.

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 28o

Aria’s POV

I intercepted Claudia. Our bodies collided.

She snarled. “Get out of my way!”

“Not a chance.”

She struck me across the face. My head snapped sideways, and I tasted blood.

Lydia roared inside my head. Fight her with your bloodline power, Aria. You can do this.

Claudia immediately used her dark powers to form a black, shimmering bubble around my brother, trapping him inside and suspending him in the air.

I glared at her. She smiled viciously.

“Let him go,” I growled.

“Never,” she snarled.

I released my bloodline power. Silver energy exploded from my body, slamming into Claudia’s barrier with enough force to shake the entire cavern. Claudia staggered, and her unnatural aura flickered.

Fear crossed her face. This was nothing compared to what she had witnessed the last time we fought on Grayson land. My power had grown since then.

“What are you?”

I stepped toward her. “Your worst mistake.”

I pushed harder. The veins beneath my skin burned as my power collided with hers.

Lydia snarled inside my head, lending me every ounce of strength she had. Break her completely.

I intend to.

The barrier fractured. A web of cracks spread across the shimmering wall of energy before it exploded outward, sending Claudia stumbling across the floor. Her control over Joshua broke with it.

I moved instantly. I lunged forward and caught Joshua before he could fall.

“Joshua!”

His body was limp against mine. For one terrifying second, there was no response. Then his fingers twitched. His eyelids fluttered.

“Aria?”

My heart nearly stopped.

That voice. That face. Joshua’s face.

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“Joshua” tightened my arms around him, tears burning my eyes. “It’s me. I’m here.”

His gaze slowly focused on mine.

“Aria...”

He lifted his arms and pulled me into an embrace. My breath caught.

For a moment, everything else disappeared. The fighting, Claudia, the blood, the fear. All of it vanished.

There was only my brother. Joshua’s arms around me. His familiar face pressed against my shoulder.

I closed my eyes.

Thank Goddess, he is safe now.

Lydia didn’t answer immediately. Instead, I felt her watching him.

Aria, something is wrong.

My eyes opened, but I didn't move.

What is wrong? I whispered.

Something is wrong with him.

My heart sank. I looked at Joshua again. His arms were still wrapped around me. His breathing was steady.

Then I saw it.

A cruel smile formed at the corner of his lips.

It disappeared so quickly that I almost convinced myself I had imagined it.

Lydia's voice was suddenly frightened. This is not Joshua, Aria. It is not him.

How is that possible? How can it not be him?

His scent is exactly like Joshua's. He looks exactly like him too. But I can feel it. Something is wrong.

Joshua noticed the way I was staring at him and searched my eyes.

"Is everything okay, little sister?"

My heart skipped.

There was something about his eyes that felt almost cold. It was completely different from the brother I had grown up with, the brother who had jumped into the ocean only days ago to save me.

I glanced at his body. It had been covered in wounds earlier, yet every injury had completely healed too quickly, far too quickly.

"Aria..." he called again.

I snapped out of my thoughts. "Yes, Joshua. Everything is all right. I am just happy to have you back."

I hugged him again, pretending nothing had changed.

I know you feel it, Aria. I know you can sense he is different, Lydia said.

You are right. My stomach twisted. This man is not my brother.

I couldn't help but remember what had happened earlier. When Claudia had demanded that I sacrifice myself in exchange for Joshua's life, he had begged me to save him.

My brother would never have done that.

Joshua would rather die than watch me sacrifice myself for him. He would never tell me outright that he was afraid and needed saving. He would have told me to leave. He would have protected me with everything he had.

Who was this man standing before me, and where was my brother?

I slowly pulled away from him.

Joshua looked at me. "Aria," he said with a smile. "I am so glad we're together again."

My fingers curled around the silver dagger hidden beneath my clothes.

Do it. Lydia's voice was cold and certain.

I didn't know if I could.

Not after everything. Not after believing I had finally saved my brother.

But I knew one thing. If I was wrong, I would live with that mistake for the rest of my life.

If I was right, I couldn't let this monster, whoever it was, hurt anyone.

I looked into Joshua's eyes.

"I'm glad you're back," I whispered.

His expression softened. "Me too."

I drew the dagger.

His eyes widened. "What are you doing?"

I drove the silver blade straight into his chest.

A scream tore through the cavern. Blood splattered across my hand.

Everyone froze.

EY

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Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 281

Aria's POV

“Aria!”

Someone shouted my name, but I didn't release the dagger.

The instant the silver touched his flesh, white light erupted from the wound. The disguised body convulsed. The face I knew began to distort. His jaw shifted. His features rippled. His skin seemed to crawl beneath itself.

The disguise shattered. Joshua's face disappeared. The man standing before me was older. His hair was darker. His features were sharper, and his eyes... I knew those eyes.

My stomach twisted.

It was Charlie, Claudia's ex-husband.

He staggered backward, clutching the silver dagger embedded in his chest.

Claudia stared at him in horror. “No...”

I tightened my grip on the dagger.

“You thought I wouldn't notice?”

Charlie glared at me. “How? How did you know?”

I pulled the dagger free. He collapsed to one knee. My breathing was ragged, but my voice remained steady.

“You really think I wouldn't know my own brother?”

The cavern went silent. Claudia's face had gone pale. I turned toward her.

Charlie clawed at his chest.

“Get it out!”

I tightened my grip on the dagger.

“You should have thought about that before pretending to be my brother.”

Charlie looked at me with pure hatred.

“You don’t understand what you’ve done.”

“I understand enough.”

The silver dagger flared again. Charlie screamed louder.

Lydia snarled inside me. He’s not going to survive.

<Chapter 228-

Good ! pushed the dagger deeper. Charlie’s body jerked violently before his knees buckled. He crashed onto the floor

For a moment, I simply stared at him. This man had stolen my brother’s face. He had used Joshua’s blood signature to fool the bond. He had made me believe, even for a moment, that I had my brother back. I couldn’t forgive him for that.

Charlie tried to lift his head.

“Claudia...”

His voice was barely audible.

I looked toward Claudia. She stood several feet away, staring at him.

“Charlie!” She rushed toward him.

I stepped between them. “Don’t.”

Claudia stopped. Her eyes burned with hatred. “You killed him.”

“He deserved it.”

“You have no idea what he meant to me.”

I laughed bitterly. “Neither did you, apparently.”

Her expression twisted. Then she raised both hands. The air changed. A pressure slammed into me. Lydia immediately pushed forward in a surge of power. I felt it too.

Something dark and enormous. Something that didn't belong to Claudia.

My eyes narrowed. "Silas's power."

Claudia's lips curved. "He gave me more than enough power to destroy you."

Dark energy gathered around her hands. The earth trembled. The force was so intense that several wolves nearby staggered backward. My skin prickled.

Lydia growled. That power is so dark.

"No," I whispered.

Claudia screamed and released it. A wave of black energy exploded toward me. I raised my hands. My bloodline power surged outward.

The two forces collided. The impact shook the entire cavern. But something went wrong. Claudia's expression changed.

"What...?" The dark energy twisted. Instead of striking me, it curved around my body. Then it slammed straight back into her.

"No!" Claudia screamed. The power wrapped around her. Her body jerked violently. Burn marks appeared across her arms. She stared at them in horror.

Chapter 278-

"What is happening?"

stepped back.

Lydia's instincts screamed at me to keep my distance. It's consuming her.

I watched as the black energy crawled across Claudia's skin. The flesh around her cheek began to blister. She screamed and clawed at her face.

"Get it off me!"

I didn't move. I couldn't.

"Silas's power isn't obeying you."

“Shut up!” She slammed her hands against the floor. The energy surged again. Her scream echoed through the room. I could smell the burning flesh. My stomach twisted.

Claudia’s skin began to discolor. Veins darkened beneath her flesh. Her eyes flashed black, then red, then black again. She was losing control.

“Claudia.”

She looked at me, and I didn’t see the confident woman who had manipulated everyone around her. I saw fear. Raw, uncontrollable fear.

“Help me, Aria.”

The words caught me off guard. “You want me to help you?”

“Please.”

I stared at her. After everything she’d done, that word almost sounded ridiculous.

“You tried to kill me. You hurt my father. You destroyed my family.”

Her eyes flickered. “I know.” She lowered her gaze. “I had no choice.”

“Everyone has a choice.”

The dark power suddenly surged through her again. Claudia screamed. I flinched.

Lydia pushed against my mind. Aria, she needs to die. Kill her!

I watched Claudia’s body convulse. The energy wasn’t simply burning her anymore. It was moving through her veins, devouring her from the inside. She dropped to one knee.

“Make it stop, please.”

Lydia pressed against my consciousness. She’s losing control. You need to end this, now.

My fingers tightened around the silver dagger. Claudia lifted her head. Her eyes were wild.

I raised the dagger. Before I could strike, Lydia suddenly snarled. Behind us.

I froze. The air changed. A cold pressure swept through the cavern. Every wolf around me stiffened. Even

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Claudia stopped screaming.

Then a voice came from the shadows.

“That’s enough.”

My blood ran cold. I turned. A figure stepped out of the darkness. Silas. He walked toward us with an unsettling calmness, as though he hadn’t just entered the middle of a battlefield.

Claudia’s expression changed immediately.

“Silas.”

Vote

< Chapter 279-e

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 282

Aria’s POV

She scrambled to her feet. Help me.”

Silas didn’t answer. She stumbled toward him.

“Please! You gave me this power. You have to take it back!”

Silas looked at her. There was no sympathy in his eyes, only indifference. “You failed.”

Claudia stopped. “What?”

“You failed to kill Aria.”

Her face crumpled. “I tried my best.”

“That isn’t good enough.”

She reached for him. “Silas, please.”

He raised one hand. His fingers closed around the top of her head. Claudia froze, and I felt the air around us shift.

Lydia's fur rose inside me. Aria, what is he doing?

I don't know.

I stared at Silas. He looked nothing like a wolf. His skin had taken on an unnatural pallor, his features sharpening into something predatory.

His eyes darkened until they seemed almost black, while his fangs slowly extended past his lips.

The veins around his eyes stood out beneath his skin, giving his face the terrifying appearance of a vampire.

Was he really a vampire? That explained why Devin described him as very powerful.

Silas's gaze fixed on Claudia. His expression was cold and inhuman, like a predator that had finally caught its prey.

Claudia suddenly screamed. "NO!"

Dark energy erupted from her body. But instead of spreading outward, it twisted through the air and rushed toward Silas's hand. The energy vanished into his palm as though he were drawing it straight from her body.

He was draining her.

"Stop!" I shouted, moving forward.

Lydia surged against me. Wait.

"He's taking her power."

And her life.

Claudia clawed at Silas's wrist. "Please!"

Silas didn't even blink. The dark energy poured out of her. Her body began changing. Her skin tightened. Her hair turned gray. Wrinkles appeared across her face.

"What are you doing?" she screamed.

Silas remained completely calm. "Taking back what belongs to me."

Claudia's screams became weaker. Her body rapidly withered beneath his hand. The strength left her limbs. Her knees buckled.

“Silas...” She sounded like a frightened child now.

“I served you. I did everything you asked.”

“I know.”

“Please... Don’t do this.”

Silas’s expression didn’t change. “You have outlived your use.”

Those words were colder than any blade. The last surge of energy left Claudia’s body. Her scream died in her throat. She collapsed. Her body hit the floor with a dull sound.

For several seconds, no one moved. I stared at her. The woman who had caused so much destruction was gone. Not wounded, not unconscious, dead.

But what disturbed me wasn’t her death. It was what remained. Her body had withered into something barely recognizable.

A shriveled wolf husk lay beneath Silas’s hand, the fur dulled and lifeless, the body unnaturally small beneath the remnants of her clothing.

My stomach turned.

Lydia growled. He is a complete monster.

I couldn’t disagree.

F

Silas released Claudia’s head. Her lifeless body dropped completely to the floor. He looked at it for a moment. Then he calmly brushed his hand against his coat, as if he’d merely removed dust from it.

“She was useful while she lasted.”

My hands curled into fists. “She worked for you, and you killed her.”

Silas looked at me. “Yes, I did.”

“You are an absolute monster.”

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A faint smile touched his lips. “I’ll take that as a compliment.”

Silas stepped closer. Every instinct in my body screamed at me to attack.

“I’ve been watching you for a very long time, Aria.”

My grip tightened on the dagger.

“And why is that?”

He took another step closer. “I needed to learn about your bloodline, your power, your connection to the wolves who came before you.”

My heart skipped.

Silas stopped several feet away.

“You must already know by now how powerful your bloodline is.” His smile widened. “It is a key to an altar your family has been protecting for generations.”

My mind raced. Silas’s expression suddenly changed. “I went through the hassle of getting your brother and giving him everything, only for him to turn on me,” he snarled.

“Where is he? Where is Joshua?”

“You ask about him as though he’s the most important secret in this room.”

“Tell me, where is he?” I snarled.

Silas ignored the question. That made my anger flare. I stepped forward.

“I asked you where Joshua is.”

His eyes darkened. “Careful now. You don’t want to do anything that would get you killed.”

“I’ve spent too long being careful.”

Power surged through my veins.

Lydia pushed forward. Let me out.

I allowed her claws to surface. My eyes burned.

“You’re not taking anything else from me.”

Silas stared at me. Then he smiled. “Good, because I don’t want to take your life.” He lifted his hand. “I want you to use the power in you.”

The air around him changed. I felt something pressing against my senses. Then his face began to move.

I froze. His skin writhed. His jaw shifted. Bones cracked beneath his flesh. His features distorted as though his face were nothing more than a mask being peeled away.

Someone behind me gasped.

I couldn't move. Lydia was suddenly silent.

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Silas's face continued to change. His hair darkened. His eyes shifted. His entire appearance transformed before us.

I stared. My heart stopped. "No..."

The face staring back at me was impossible. It was a face I knew.

Chapter 280-

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 283

Aria's POV

A

I couldn't breathe. I stared at the man standing before me, my mind refusing to accept what my eyes were seeing.

This explains why we caught that familiar scent from Silas's office on that ship, Lydia recalled, equally stunned.

I turned, fixing my attention on Damon.

He was staring at Silas as if the world beneath his feet had vanished.

His face had gone completely pale. His eyes were wide, his breathing shallow, and even Rhein seemed to have gone silent inside him.

Then Damon whispered, "Father?" The word barely left his lips.

My heart tightened.

Aria, Lydia whispered. That's his father.

I knew, but knowing it did not make it easier to believe.

Silas was Damon's father. The man Damon had mourned years ago was standing right in front of us, alive.

Not only alive, but transformed into something that looked nothing like the werewolf he had once been.

Silas's lips curved into a faint smile. "Damon, son."

Damon flinched at the sound of his name.

Silas studied him for a moment, and something almost resembling amusement flickered in his eyes.

"This isn't exactly the kind of reunion I imagined."

Damon's hands slowly curled into fists. "You died."

Silas's smile disappeared. "I was presumed dead."

"You were my father!" Damon snarled. His Alpha aura exploded through the cavern, heavy and suffocating.

"I watched them bury an empty coffin because they told me there was nothing left of you."

Silas smelled wrong. There was the familiar scent of a werewolf buried beneath something else. Something that reminded me of blood and ancient forests after a storm.

He wasn't entirely a wolf anymore, and he wasn't entirely a vampire either. He was something in between.

Damon stepped forward. His voice dropped into a dangerous growl.

"How did you become this?"

Silas tilted his head, then glanced down at his hands. Something resembling regret crossed his face, then

<Chapter 280

vanished.

“I became this because I refused to accept the limitations of our kind.”

Damon stared at him. “What does that mean?”

“It means I wanted more.” Silas’s voice remained calm, almost conversational

“Every werewolf eventually reaches the limits of their body. Even an Alpha. Even an Alpha with an exceptionally strong bloodline. Our healing slows with age, our strength weakens. Eventually, our bodies

fail.”

His eyes hardened. “I wasn’t willing to accept that fate.”

Damon shook his head slowly. “So you turned yourself into this?”

“I found people who had already defeated death.”

A chill traveled down my spine.

“Vampires,” I whispered.

Silas looked at me. “Yes, that is correct. I made a bargain with them. They promised me immortality. A lifespan far beyond anything a werewolf could naturally possess.”

Damon’s expression twisted with disgust. “What was the price?”

Silas laughed quietly. “There is always a price.”

He looked at his own arm. For a moment, the skin seemed to ripple beneath his sleeve.

“My body could not fully accept the alteration.”

His voice became colder. “The vampire essence extended my life, but it also corrupted the wolf within me. My body has been in a constant state of collapse ever since.”

Damon stared at him. “You’ve been dying this entire time.”

“Not dying.” Silas’s eyes flashed darkly. “Fighting.”

He stepped forward.

“Every day, my body tears itself apart and rebuilds itself. The vampire blood keeps me alive, but it cannot stabilize the conflict between the two sides of my nature.”

I felt something twist painfully in my stomach. “So that’s why you need my bloodline power.”

Silas looked directly at me. “Exactly.”

Damon immediately moved in front of me.

His Alpha aura surged through the room. “You stay away from her.”

Silas smiled. “I knew you would say that.”

Damon’s eyes narrowed. “I would kill you before I let you anywhere near Aria.”

Chapter 280-

Silas held Damon’s gaze. “You will do no such thing, son.”

Then his gaze shifted toward me. “Your family possesses one of the rarest bloodlines among werewolves, Aria. A bloodline capable of restoring what has been damaged in me.”

He smiled. “Your power doesn’t merely heal wounds. It can stabilize supernatural energy that is otherwise incompatible.”

I remembered the strange sensations I had experienced whenever my power reacted. The heat beneath my skin. The way my bloodline seemed to recognize things before I understood them.

Lydia growled. We would never give him our power.

I tightened my fists. Never.

Silas continued. “Joshua had the same bloodline, but his is incomplete.”

My chest tightened at the mention of my brother. “Where is he? What did you do to him?”

Silas didn’t answer immediately.

That silence was enough to make my blood run cold.

Damon stepped closer. “What did you do to Joshua?”

E

Chapter 284.

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 284

Aria's POV

Silas looked at him. "He is alive and well in one of my safehouses. The altar required a complete bloodline activation. Joshua could not provide it."

My heart hammered against my ribs. His eyes settled on me.

"Only you can."

The air seemed to grow colder. I instinctively stepped back.

Damon reached for my hand, his fingers wrapping tightly around mine.

The mate bond pulsed between us, warm and fierce.

I squeezed his hand. Silas watched us. Something dark flickered in his expression.

"That bond will make this more difficult."

Damon's eyes flashed gold. "Try me."

His Alpha power slammed into the cavern.

My wolf rose immediately, her instincts responding to his dominance.

Lydia's fur stood on end. Protect him.

I will.

Silas didn't even flinch. Instead, he looked at Damon with something almost like disappointment.

"You still don't understand. I need Aria's bloodline power to complete the altar and stabilize my body."

His gaze hardened. "Without it, I will eventually lose control of the vampire essence inside me."

Damon's expression remained cold. "That's not my problem."

“No.” Silas’s voice dropped. “But it will become yours.”

The air seemed to freeze.

Damon stared at him. Silas took another step forward.

“I am still your father, Damon. That means I can give you one final order.”

Damon’s eyes narrowed. “You have no authority over me.”

“I am asking you to kill Aria.”

My heart stopped.

Damon went completely still.

<Chapter 281

Lydia snarled inside me. No, he can’t do that

Silas continued. “Take her blood. Bring it to me. Let’s complete the sacrifice.”

Damon’s fingers tightened around mine. “You’ve lost your mind.”

“I am offering you a choice” Silas’s expression became terrifyingly calm. “Kill Aria and save yourself.”

Damon’s eyes flashed gold. “And if I don’t?”

Silas looked around the cavern. “Refuse me, and I will destroy every surviving member of the Grayson family.”

My blood ran cold. “My father, Joshua.”

The thought of anything happening to my father or brother ripped my heart to shreds.

Silas looked directly at me.

“Your father, Joshua, and anyone still loyal to the Grayson bloodline. Anyone who carries even a trace of your family’s legacy.”

His gaze returned to Damon. “I will wipe them all out.”

Damon’s POV

My father's face stared back at me. For years, I had mourned him. I had stood beside his grave and believed I had watched the man who raised me disappear forever.

I had carried the weight of his death without knowing it had been a lie. And now he stood in front of me, alive, threatening me, asking me to kill my mate and offer her blood to him for sacrifice.

My body moved before my mind could catch up. I lunged at him.

"You're not touching her!"

Rhein took over. My claws extended as I slammed into Silas. The impact sent us both crashing to the floor. I struck him across the face. He barely moved. I hit him again, but nothing.

His eyes remained fixed on mine. "You've grown stronger."

I snarled. "I'll kill you."

Silas caught my wrist.

The ease with which he stopped me sent a jolt of fear through Rhein. He's too strong.

I twisted free and drove my knee into his stomach.

At the same time, another body slammed into Silas. It was Ryder, then Noah joined us. Three Alpha wolves against one.

Noah shifted halfway, his claws extending as he attacked from Silas's blind side. Ryder struck from the other. I drove forward.

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Our attacks came relentlessly. Claws; fangs, blood, and power, but Silas barely staggered.

He caught Ryder by the throat and threw him across the cavern, Noah charged. Silas turned and struck him with one hand. Noah flew backward.

I attacked again. Silas caught my fist. Then he smiled. "You might be strong, but three of you combined do not stand a chance against me."

He threw me into the wall. Pain exploded through my back. I crashed to the floor.

"Damon!" Aria's voice reached me.

I forced myself upright.

Rhein growled. Charge at him again.

I wiped the blood from my mouth.

Noah and I attacked together. Noah's claws tore across Silas's shoulder. Ryder struck his ribs. I drove my fist into his jaw. For one brief moment, I thought we'd finally hurt him.

Then Silas roared. A wave of power exploded from his body. We were thrown backward simultaneously.

I hit the floor hard enough to knock the air from my lungs. Ryder groaned. Noah struggled to rise. Silas stood untouched. His clothes were torn, but his wounds were already closing.

"Is that all?"

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 285

Damon's POV

I stared at him.

Rhein's instincts screamed. We need to run. Take Aria and run.

I had never heard my wolf say that. Not to an enemy, not even to another Alpha. But Silas wasn't simply another Alpha. He was something else, something unnatural.

I pushed myself up. "You won't have her."

Silas looked at me. "That isn't your decision."

His eyes flashed. Then pain exploded inside my skull. I screamed. My hands flew to my head.

"Damon!" Aria rushed toward me.

I couldn't hear her clearly. Something was wrapping itself around my mind.

A command, a presence. My father's voice.

"Kill her," he ordered.

“No.” The word barely escaped my lips. Silas stepped closer, and Aria instinctively moved back. Noah and Ryder stood in front of her.

The blood inside my veins suddenly burned. I dropped to my knees.

Rhein howled. Fight it!

“I’m trying!”

My father’s voice echoed inside my mind again. Kill Aria. My body jerked. I slammed my palms against the floor.

“No!”

Silas looked down at me. “You cannot fight your blood.”

I glared up at him. “I am not yours.”

His expression remained calm. “You are my son.”

The words struck like chains. The blood bond. Silas was using it as a weapon. He had hidden

+25 Pointa

a command inside the bond, and now he was activating it.

Rhein fought desperately. We don’t hurt our mate.

“I know!” My claws dug into the floor.

Fight him!

“I am trying!”

My muscles tightened. Then my body stood.

“No.” My voice shook.

Silas smiled. “Go to her.”

My legs moved. I couldn’t stop them. “No!”

I tried to force my feet backward. They moved forward. Every step felt like someone else was

controlling my body.

Rhein thrashed inside me. STOP!

“I can’t!”

My vision blurred. I could see Aria ahead, behind Ryder and Noah.

Her eyes were fearful. “Damon.”

I tried to speak. My jaw moved. “Run.”

The word came out barely above a whisper. Aria stared at me. My father’s command slammed into my mind again. Kill her.

My body accelerated. “No!”

I fought the command with everything inside me. My claws extended.

Rhein screamed. She is our mate!

I knew. Every cell in my body knew. The mate bond between Aria and me burned through my

chest. She was my Luna, my fated mate. The woman I would die to protect, and my body was

moving toward her with the intention of killing her.

I tried to stop. My muscles ignored me. I forced my mouth open.

“Aria... run...”

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Silas tightened his control. Pain ripped through my skull. The command crushed my resistance. My arms lifted. My claws aimed toward her.

Aria didn’t move. Her eyes were locked onto mine. “Damon.”

Aria’s POV

Ryder and Noah moved at the same time. Ryder slammed into Damon from the side, wrapping an arm around his torso and trying to wrench him backward, while Noah came from the opposite direction and drove his shoulder into Damon's chest.

The impact sent all three of them crashing to the ground.

Damon snarled, not like himself. The sound was deeper, more feral, stripped of every trace of

the man I knew.

His eyes burned with a cold, unnatural light as he shoved Ryder away with enough force to send him stumbling several feet across the floor.

"Ryder!" I shouted.

"I'm fine!" he snapped, catching himself before he hit the ground.

Noah was already moving again. He lunged at Damon, and the two collided in a blur of fists,

claws, and supernatural strength. Damon swung. Noah ducked.

Ryder came in from behind and caught Damon's arm, twisting it hard enough that I heard the

joint c***k.

Damon didn't even flinch. He simply turned and struck Ryder across the chest. Ryder flew backward.

"Damon!"

I ran toward him.

Aria, don't! Lydia's warning slammed into my mind. He's not himself.

"I know."

My gaze locked on Damon. His face was twisted with rage, but beneath it, I could feel something else. He was fighting his father's command, but failing.

I reached for him with my bloodline power. The moment my power touched his mind, agony

+25 Paints

ripped through me. I gasped.

There was something wrapped around his consciousness. A dark, pulsing force. The blood bond between him and his father.

There! Lydia snarled. That's what's controlling him.

"I can feel it."

I pushed harder. Golden energy surged through my veins, flooding my hands and spreading

toward Damon. He staggered. For one brief second, his expression changed.

His eyes flickered. The unnatural coldness disappeared, and I saw him. Damon. He was confused and frightened.

"Aria?"

My heart nearly stopped. "Damon!"

I reached toward him. His hand lifted. Our fingers were inches apart.

Then the blood bond struck. Damon's body jerked violently, and the darkness returned to his

eyes.

"No!"

I released another wave of power. The force around him pushed back. It was like trying to tear apart a mountain with my bare hands.

Don't stop, Lydia urged. He's in there. Keep calling him.

"Damon, listen to me!"

He charged. I barely moved out of the way before his fist slammed into the wall behind me.

Stone cracked.

“Damon, it’s me!”

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Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 286

Aria’s POV

Damon turned. I saw no recognition. Only that terrible emptiness. I swallowed the panic rising in my throat.

“You know me. You know my voice.”

His claws emerged.

I continued. “You know my scent. You know our bond.”

Something inside him twitched. I felt it. A faint pull. A thread buried beneath layers of darkness. Our mate bond.

I grabbed onto it with everything I had.

Damon. I pushed my consciousness toward his. It’s me. Aria.

The thread strengthened. For a moment, warmth spread through my chest. I could almost feel him reaching back. Then I hit something. An invisible, impenetrable barrier. I recoiled.

“What the hell?”

Something is blocking us, Lydia whispered.

I pushed again. The barrier trembled but refused to break. And then I understood. It wasn’t

only Silas's blood bond.

Something else had formed around our connection. A membrane. A wall built from years of

separation, pain, and resentment.

Our mate bond had survived, but it had been buried so deeply that I couldn't properly reach

him through it.

"No," I whispered.

Aria... Lydia said. It is not working.

"I can break it."

Can you?

I didn't answer because I wasn't sure. I forced more of my bloodline power into the bond.

+25 Peunes

Pain exploded through my skull. I screamed.

"Damon!"

His head snapped toward me. For one heartbeat, his eyes cleared. His lips moved. "Run...
Aria."

I froze. "Damon?"

"Run!"

The blood bond surged. Damon roared and lunged toward me. Ryder intercepted him. The two crashed together. Noah joined them instantly.

"Damon is fighting it!" Ryder shouted.

"I know!"

"Then do something! Reach him through the mate bond."

“I’m trying!”

Noah grabbed Damon’s wrist while Ryder locked his arms around Damon’s neck. Damon fought like a cornered beast. His claws tore through Ryder’s sleeve. Noah gritted his teeth as

Damon slammed him against the floor.

“Aria!” Noah yelled. “Now!”

I stepped forward. I gathered every ounce of bloodline power I possessed. The air around me

trembled. Golden light erupted from my body.

Lydia rose inside me with a roar. Let’s break the blood bond!

I reached for the darkness inside Damon. My power crashed into it. For a moment, the entire

room went silent. Then the blood bond pushed back. The force knocked me off my feet. I hit

the ground hard. Pain shot through my spine.

“No!”

I forced myself upright. Damon had broken free. Ryder rushed after him. Noah followed.

Damon turned toward me. Our eyes met. And there it was again. That tiny flicker. That desperate, buried piece of him.

“Damon...”

He froze.

I stood. “You told me to run.” His jaw tightened. “You were trying to protect me.”

His eyes flickered.

“You are still in there. I know you can hear me.”

His breathing became ragged.

I took another step. “You are my mate.” A tear slipped down my cheek.

The bond between us pulsed. Then another presence overwhelmed him. Silas moved with terrifying speed.

Before any of us could react, he seized Damon from behind. Damon snarled and fought him.

Silas tightened his grip.

“Let me go!” Damon roared.

The sound shattered me. He was fighting. He was still fighting.

“Damon!”

I ran toward them. Silas looked at me. His eyes were cold.

I unleashed my power. Silas staggered but didn’t release Damon. His vampire-enhanced strength made him almost impossible to overpower.

Noah attacked. Ryder followed. Silas threw Noah aside and kicked Ryder across the cavern.

Then he dragged Damon toward the exit.

I chased them.

“Damon!”

Damon turned his head. For a second, our eyes met. I could see the struggle inside him. His

lips parted.

“Aria...”

I stopped breathing.

Then Silas pulled him through the entrance.

“No!” I sprinted after them. But by the time I reached the corridor, they were already

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disappearing into the darkness.

“Damon!”

I ran after them until my lungs burned. His scent was fading. His footsteps grew distant.

Then there was nothing, only silence.

I stopped, staring into the darkness where he had vanished. My chest heaved.

My knees weakened.

Aria, we lost him. Lydia’s voice was strangely quiet.

The words struck deeper than any blade.

“We’ll get him back,” I said.

But even as I said it, something inside me was collapsing. Then Lydia made a sound. A low,

broken keen.

I froze. It wasn’t a growl. It wasn’t a howl. It was something I had never heard from her before. It sounded like grief given a voice.

Lydia?

She didn’t answer. Another soft keen escaped her.

My hand moved instinctively to my chest. There was an emptiness there, a hollow opening where something vital had been ripped away.

I slid down the wall and sank onto the floor. My fingers curled against my chest.

“Damon... I’ll find you,” I whispered into the darkness. “I swear, I will.”

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 287

Damon’s POV

The moment Silas dragged me back into the secret base, the smell of blood and damp stone

filled my lungs.

My body was moving, but it wasn't obeying me. Every step I took felt like a battle between my

own will and the foreign command buried inside my veins.

Fight. Rhein's voice was faint, barely more than a whisper. Don't let him take us.

I clenched my fists. I couldn't answer him aloud. I wasn't even sure Silas would notice the struggle happening inside my head. But I could feel Rhein. He was still there, still fighting.

Silas led me down a narrow corridor before stopping in front of a reinforced metal door. He

opened it. My gaze immediately landed on the figure lying on the floor.

It was Joshua. Silver chains wrapped around his wrists, ankles, and torso. His body was motionless. His face was pale, but his chest rose and fell.

He was still alive. My breathing steadied. Thank Goddess.

Joshua. Rhein stirred inside me. Aria's brother. We have to find a way to save him.

I stared at him for several seconds. Silas noticed.

"Interesting, isn't it?" he said. "I didn't really think you would care about him."

I turned my head toward him. My expression remained cold.

"What you are doing is absolutely wrong."

Silas smiled. "You would eventually come around, son."

Ignoring him, I looked back at Joshua, Aria's brother. The man whose death would destroy her.

I didn't know whether Aria would ever forgive me for what was happening, but I knew one

thing... I would not allow Joshua to die because of my father's sins.

My father had created monsters. He had destroyed lives. He had spilled blood without hesitation. I wasn't going to become him. I would stop him instead.

Silas walked closer. "You could save him."

My eyes narrowed. "How?"

"Join me."

I laughed quietly. There was no humor in it. "You kidn*pped me, chained Aria's brother to the

floor, and you're asking me to join you?"

Silas's expression didn't change. "You misunderstand me, Damon." He stepped closer. "You

and I could remake the order of wolfkind."

I stared at him. "The order of wolfkind?"

"Yes." His eyes gleamed. "For centuries, wolves have lived beneath meaningless traditions.

Alphas cling to outdated laws. Packs fight over territory. Bloodlines are diluted by weak unions. The powerful are forced to kneel before councils and elders."

He spread his arms. "We can change that. We can rule over all of them." His jaw tightened.

"All you need to do is stand beside me."

"I would rather die than do that," I snarled.

Silas's eyes darkened. "You'd choose them over your own blood?"

"I choose what is right."

"You are my son."

"Unfortunately, that is not something I'm proud of."

Silas went still. Genuine anger flickered across his face. "Be careful, son."

“I do not fear you.”

That wasn't entirely true. I feared what he could do to Aria. That was the only thing keeping

my voice steady.

Silas stared at me for a long moment. Then he smiled. “You're still resisting. I can feel it.” His gaze dropped toward my chest. “Your wolf is fighting the blood bond.”

Rhein snarled inside me.

Silas stepped closer. “You think resistance makes you strong.” His voice lowered. “It doesn't.”

The pressure inside my skull suddenly increased. I staggered. My hands flew to my head.

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Pain exploded behind my eyes. I dropped to one knee.

Rhein roared. FIGHT HIM!

I gritted my teeth. Silas watched with calm satisfaction.

“You cannot escape blood, Damon.”

I forced myself upright. “Watch me.”

He laughed. “You still don't understand.” He crouched in front of me. “The blood bond doesn't

need your permission.” His eyes bored into mine. “Every command I give becomes a command your body recognizes.”

My muscles suddenly locked. I tried to move, but nothing happened.

Silas whispered, “Kneel.”

My knees buckled. I caught myself with one hand before I hit the floor.

“No.” The word came through clenched teeth.

Silas smiled. “You see?”

I forced myself back up. The command was fighting against my own will. My muscles wanted to obey, but my mind refused.

Silas stood. “Eventually, there won’t be anything left for you to resist with.”

I looked toward Joshua. Then I thought of Aria.

Keep your focus on Aria. Rhein’s voice softened. Remember our mate.

I closed my eyes. I remembered her. I held onto memories of her. They were mine. Silas couldn’t take them, or so I believed.

“You will be sent after Aria,” Silas said.

My eyes opened. “What?”

“Once the conditioning is complete.” His expression became almost pleased. “You will find Aria. You will capture her.”

My blood ran cold. I shook my head. “I will do no such thing!”

He smiled wickedly. “You will, son. You will bring her to me, and we will complete the final

sacrifice.”

Rage exploded through me. “Don’t touch her!”

He placed one hand on my shoulder. The blood bond surged. I tried to pull away. My muscles

wouldn’t respond. Silas moved his other hand toward my head.

“Once your mind is fully suppressed, you won’t remember resisting me.”

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 288

Damon’s POV

I glared at him. "You'll never have me."

He leaned closer. "You already belong to me, son."

His palm settled against the top of my head. The world changed. Pain tore through my skull.

I screamed.

Rhein's roar thundered through my mind. NO!

I collapsed onto one knee. The blood bond flooded through my veins. It wasn't merely controlling my body anymore. It was entering my thoughts.

Memories began flashing through my mind. Memories of my time with Aria, her scent, and

our bond.

Silas pushed deeper. "Aria is your enemy."

The command echoed inside my skull. Aria is your enemy.

No! Rhein fought back. She is our mate!

The pressure intensified. My vision blurred. Silas's voice became the only thing I could hear.

You will obey me. You will capture Aria.

"I won't." My heart pounded.

She's the sacrifice.

"No." Rhein fought back.

She's the enemy.

"No!" Rhein's voice was weakening. Damon... don't let him...

I fought harder. But something was happening to my wolf. The blood bond wrapped around

Rhein like chains. His growls became distant. His presence began fading.

Rhein. I called out. There was no answer.

My heart cracked. Rhein!

A faint growl reached me. I'm... still here.

I clung to his voice. Silas pushed deeper. The memories began changing. Our love became pain. Our mate bond became weakness. Aria's face became associated with betrayal.

Every happy memory was twisted. Every moment of trust was poisoned. I knew what was happening. He was brainwashing me. He was rewriting the meaning of everything I loved.

I fought until my muscles trembled. Until my mind screamed. Until even breathing became

difficult. But the blood bond was stronger. Silas's voice became distant and distorted.

"You will obey me."

My resistance weakened. "No..."

"You will capture Aria and bring her to me."

My eyes closed. Images of Aria filled my mind. I reached for her one last time.

Aria...

Rhein's presence flickered. Remember... our mate.

Then darkness swallowed him. My resistance began to disappear. The commands settled deeper and deeper, until even the word "no" felt foreign.

Silas removed his hand. I remained kneeling. He looked down at me.

"Stand."

My body obeyed.

"Look at me."

I raised my head. His eyes met mine.

"Who do you serve?"

My lips parted. “You,” I said.

Silas smiled. “Good. This is just the beginning, son.”

Aria’s POV

For an entire month, we hunted Silas. Every lead disappeared. Every trail went cold. Every

location we searched turned out to be another dead end.

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Noah spent hours tracking signals, hacking into encrypted networks, and tracing every digital

footprint Silas might have left behind, but every time he got close, the signal vanished.

“It’s happening again,” Noah said one night, staring at his laptop.

I stood behind him, arms folded tightly across my chest.

“What is it?”

“The signal was here.” He pointed at the screen. “Thirty seconds ago, I had a direct trace. Now it’s gone.”

Ryder leaned over the table. “Blocked?”

“Not just blocked.” Noah’s jaw tightened. “Someone is actively scrubbing the trail.”

I stared at the screen. My stomach twisted.

Silas. Lydia growled softly inside me. He’s hiding.

“I know.”

Ryder pushed away from the table. “My contacts haven’t found anything either. Not a safe house, not a transport route, not a financial trail. Silas has disappeared.”

I hated that word. Disappeared. As if a man like Silas could simply vanish from the world. He

had Damon with him. That thought alone made my chest ache.

I closed my eyes. For a month, I had woken every morning hoping to feel something through

the mate bond, but there had been nothing.

Three days later, Silas found us first. An invitation arrived. Not a threat. Not an anonymous

message. An invitation. The location was written clearly. The date and even the time were included.

Beneath it was one final line.

Aria Grayson is invited to witness the final sacrifice.

My blood ran cold. Noah read the message twice. Then he looked at me.

“No, Aria, you can’t go.”

Ryder nodded. “He’s baiting you.”

I sighed. “I know.”

“Then you understand why you can’t go.”

I looked at the location again. “He gave us exactly what we’ve spent a month looking for.”

“Because he wants you there,” Noah said. His voice hardened. “Aria, this is obviously a trap.”

I looked up. “I know.”

Ryder crossed his arms. “And you’re still considering it?”

“I’m not considering it.” I folded the invitation. “I’m going.”

Noah’s eyes darkened. “No, Aria, you can’t.”

I met his gaze. “You don’t get to decide that. Silas has Damon.”

The room went silent. Noah’s expression tightened. “I know, but Damon is his son.”

“He also has Joshua, my brother.”

That changed everything. Ryder looked away.

I swallowed. Silas had chosen his leverage carefully. He knew exactly which people I would

never abandon.

Noah stepped closer. “If you walk into that place, he could kill you.”

My heart clenched. “He could.”

“Then why do you insist on going?”

I stared at him. “Because if I don’t go, I will lose my only chance.”

E

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 289

Aria’s POV

Noah’s jaw tightened. “Chance for what?”

I didn’t answer immediately because there was something I hadn’t told them. Something I had been preparing for weeks. A hidden card. One Silas wouldn’t expect.

Lydia stirred. Are you sure it will work?

No, I am not.

Then why are you doing this?

Because doing nothing guarantees we lose.

Lydia was silent. Then she growled softly. Then we go.

I looked at Noah. “I have a plan.”

He shook his head. “That’s what you said the last time.”

“This time it’s different.”

He folded his arms. “Enlighten me. What is this plan?”

“I can’t tell you.”

His eyes narrowed. “You don’t trust me?”

“I trust you.” I held his gaze. “That’s exactly why I can’t tell you.”

Ryder sighed. “This is a terrible idea.”

“Probably.” I gave him a tired smile. “But it’s the only one we have.”

The day of the ritual arrived too quickly. By sunset, I stood before the entrance to the designated site.

Lydia’s fur rose along my spine. I smell danger.

It was as expected. The moon hung low above the trees. I stepped forward. The moment I crossed the boundary, I felt a pressure against my skin. A suppression field.

Lydia immediately recoiled. He came prepared.

We weren’t expecting anything less.

I continued walking. The pathway opened into a clearing, and there it was, the altar.

My eyes moved across the clearing, then stopped. Damon stood beside the altar. My breath

caught.

His clothes were dark, his posture rigid. His eyes were empty.

“Damon...”

He looked at me. There was no recognition or warmth in his eyes.

Lydia reacted instantly. Mate.

My chest tightened. I took a step forward.

Then I saw Joshua. He was bound before the altar. Silver chains wrapped around his wrists

and torso. His head hung forward. My stomach dropped.

“Joshua!”

His head lifted slightly. “Aria...” His voice was weak.

I started forward. Damon stepped between us. His claws extended. I stopped.

“Damon.”

His expression didn’t change. Silas appeared behind the altar.

He smiled. “Welcome, Aria.”

I glared at him. “Let Joshua go.”

Silas laughed. “Straight to business.” He gestured toward Damon. “You see? I kept my promise. Now all you have to do is sacrifice yourself to the altar, and your brother will be set

free.”

He tilted his head toward Damon and continued, “If you don’t, Damon will kill your brother.”

My hands curled into fists. I stared at Damon. “Damon, look at me.” His eyes met mine.

I reached for the mate bond. Damon. I pushed my consciousness toward him. There was nothing. A barrier slammed into me.

I recoiled. Pain stabbed through my skull.

Aria! Lydia snarled. The bond is blocked.

“I know.”

I tried again. Damon, please. But there was nothing. His eyes remained cold. I searched them

desperately.

“Don’t you remember me? I am your mate.”

His jaw tightened.

Silas laughed softly. “Don’t waste your breath.”

I ignored him. “Damon, I’m here.”

I stepped closer. “Damon...”

He suddenly raised his claws. I stopped. His voice was flat. “Stay back.”

My heart shattered. He had spoken, but it wasn’t his voice, not the one I was used to.

Silas walked toward Joshua. “Now let’s begin.” He grabbed Joshua by the hair and forced his

head up. Joshua groaned.

“Cooperate, and your brother survives.”

I stared at him. “What exactly do you want?”

Silas smiled. “Your blood.”

I felt Lydia tense. Aria, don’t do it.

Silas pointed toward the altar. “Walk forward.”

I didn’t move.

“Damon will kill your brother if you refuse.”

My gaze snapped toward him. Damon’s claws tightened.

Joshua shook his head weakly. “Aria... don’t.”

“Quiet,” Silas snapped. He pressed a blade against Joshua’s throat.

My heart raced. “Stop.”

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Silas smiled. “Then come to the altar.”

I stared at Damon. He was standing between me and Joshua.

I reached for the mate bond one more time, but there was nothing.

I looked at the altar, then at Joshua, then at Damon.

Silas smiled. “You have a choice, Aria. Don’t make me repeat myself.”

I slowly stepped toward the altar. The symbols beneath my feet began glowing. My bloodline

power reacted immediately.

Lydia growled. It's a ritual circle. It's draining energy from you.

"I know."

I looked at Damon. There was one thing Silas didn't know. One thing I had kept hidden. One

card I hadn't played.

I kept walking until I reached the altar.

Silas smiled. "Good choice."

He raised the blade. "Give me your blood."

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 290

Aria's POV

I slowly extended my hand. He sliced it with a blade.

The moment my blood touched the altar, the entire chamber changed. The runes carved into

the stone flared crimson.

Heat exploded beneath my palms. I gasped. Then the altar pulled at something inside me.

My bloodline, my wolf, my very life force.

A scream tore from my throat as the energy was ripped out of my body.

Aria! Lydia's voice crashed through my mind. Get off it!

"I'm trying!" I pushed against the altar, but the runes tightened around me like invisible

chains. Pain tore through my veins. My vision blurred. I could feel my bloodline being dragged toward the ancient symbols beneath me.

Silas stood several feet away, watching with a satisfied smile. “Beautiful, isn’t it?”

I glared at him through the pain. “You call this beautiful?”

He tilted his head. “Power always is.” His eyes glowed crimson, and the tips of his fangs showed as he smiled. “You should be honored. Your blood is being used for the greater good.”

“I’d rather die.”

“You may.” His smile widened. “But not before you give me what I need.”

A roar shook the chamber. It was Noah.

“ARREST HIM!”

Noah and Ryder charged. Several wolves moved to intercept them. Noah tore through the first guard and kept moving. Ryder followed. They were almost at the altar when the runes surrounding the chamber ignited.

A wall of force exploded outward. Both of them were thrown backward. Noah hit the stone floor hard enough to c***k it.

“NOAH!”

+25 Porta

I tried to move toward him. The altar pulled harder. I screamed, my fingers digging into my

skin.

“Aria!” Ryder staggered upright. “Get away from there!”

“I can’t!”

The runes flashed again. My body jerked, and more energy ripped out of me. My heart pounded violently. My lungs couldn’t draw enough air.

Aria, it is taking too much of your energy. Lydia sounded frightened. You need to shift now.

She was right. I couldn't remain human. The altar was feeding on my bloodline. I needed to

weaken it. Also, I could try to break Silas's hold on Damon through physical contact.

Pain exploded through my body. Bones cracked, muscles shifted. My claws tore through the

skin of my fingers. Fur erupted across my body. I hit the ground on four paws.

The altar's pull weakened for one precious second.

Now! Lydia surged forward.

I sprang and launched myself toward Damon. He stood beside Joshua, his eyes glowing red.

He reacted instantly, raising his arm. I slammed into him, and we crashed onto the floor.

For one heartbeat, I was pressed against my mate. His scent flooded my senses.

Rhein! Lydia cried out. I can feel him!

I pressed my forehead against Damon's. His body went rigid. I pushed my consciousness toward him.

"Damon..."

There was nothing, then a flicker. His eyes darkened, and my heart leapt.

He's there. I pressed harder. Rhein!

A faint growl answered.

I almost sobbed. "Damon, fight him."

Damon's claws dug into the ground. His body trembled. For one second, his eyes became his

own. Then Silas screamed.

"ENOUGH!"

He slammed his hand against one of the runes. The entire chamber shook. A wave of power

struck me. I was thrown away from Damon.

I hit the altar. The runes activated. My body was forced back into human form. Pain tore through me. I collapsed onto the ground.

Silas walked toward me. “You really thought you could break my control with the mate bond?”

I tried to rise, my arms shaking. “I almost did.”

His smile disappeared. “You did nothing.”

Silas’s eyes flashed as he crouched beside me. His fingers wrapped around my chin. His skin

was unnaturally cold. I shuddered.

“You are beginning to understand how useless resistance is.”

I stared into his crimson eyes. “You’re scared. You fear I would break the blood bond, don’t

you?”

His smile vanished. I smiled despite the pain.

“You felt him fight you.”

His fangs extended. “Shut up.” He released me. “Activate the runes.

The altar flared. I screamed. The energy began draining from me again, this time much faster. My bloodline burned through my veins as though someone had poured fire directly into them.

My fingers went numb. My heartbeat became sluggish.

Lydia’s voice faded. Aria... I’m getting tired, so tired.

Stay with me, please. I begged.

I tried to reach for her. She sounded farther away.

I can't hold on.

"No!"

I forced my bloodline outward. The altar absorbed it instantly. My vision darkened.

Noah and Ryder were still fighting off Silas's men. Their attacks kept bouncing off the barrier. Silas laughed. "You are all wasting your strength."

I couldn't answer. My body felt impossibly heavy. Damon stood several feet away. His eyes were still red. Joshua was still trapped, and I was running out of time.

Aria. Lydia's voice was barely a whisper. Don't let go.

"I won't."

I tried to lift my head. Damon was watching me. Something flickered in his expression. A tiny movement, almost nothing, but I saw it.

His fingers curled. His jaw tightened. Rhein was fighting.

I smiled faintly. "You can do it."

Silas turned toward him. "What are you doing?"

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 291

Aria's POV

Damon didn't answer. His head lowered. His shoulders shook.

Silas's expression hardened. "Look at me, Damon."

Damon remained still.

"LOOK AT ME!"

+25 Punts.

Damon suddenly lifted his head. His eyes flashed dark, then red, then dark again. I felt the

mate bond pulse. Once, then twice. A tiny spark of warmth spread through my chest.

Lydia gasped. He's fighting.

Silas stepped toward Damon. "Don't make me force you."

Damon's lips parted. "Aria..."

My heart broke. "I'm here."

Silas raised his hand. The blood bond struck Damon again. He screamed.

I screamed with him. "Stop!"

The altar pulled harder. My vision went black around the edges. I could barely breathe.

Then a roar came from the flank. It was not Noah or Ryder. Every head turned at the sound.

A figure charged through the smoke and shattered stone. Silas's expression changed. He looked afraid. I had never seen him like this.

The figure crossed into the altar's range. The runes flickered. Lydia suddenly lifted her head inside me.

Aria... Her voice trembled. We know that scent. It's her. She has arrived.

Finally. I breathed. My heart slammed against my ribs. The figure stepped into the light, and everything changed.

Lydia was right. It was Damon's mother, my hidden card.

Lady Duran stood at the edge of the altar's range, her chest rising and falling heavily. Her

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eyes were fixed on Damon, and there was something fierce in them that I hadn't seen before.

Lydia stirred inside me. I hope this works.

I swallowed. "I hope so too."

Lady Duran's gaze shifted to me. We had spoken about this. I had told her everything.

I told her about Silas, about the blood bond, about the control buried inside Damon, and

about the one possibility I believed could reach him when everything else failed... his mother's bloodline.

A mother's blood carried a connection that even Silas's altered blood might struggle to completely erase. Lady Duran had agreed to take the risk.

Now she raised her wrist, her claws extended. She dragged one claw across her palm. Blood

welled immediately.

Silas's expression changed. "How dare you."

Lady Duran looked at him coldly. "You've had my son long enough."

Silas laughed. "You think your blood can compete with mine?"

"I don't think." Her eyes hardened. "I know."

She slashed her palm and pressed it against the ground. The blood spread across the ancient stone. Golden-red light erupted beneath her. The runes around the altar flickered.

Silas's smile disappeared. "No."

Lady Duran pushed her bloodline power outward. The force slammed into Damon. He screamed. His body jerked violently.

I cried out. "Damon!"

He dropped to one knee, his claws digging into the ground.

Silas immediately raised both hands. "You will not take him from me!"

Dark crimson energy surged from his body. The scent of blood filled the chamber. It was overwhelming, vampire blood.

The veins beneath Silas's pale skin darkened as his altered nature surged forward. His fangs

lengthened. His eyes became completely crimson.

Lady Duran didn't retreat. She pushed harder. "Damon!" Her voice echoed through the

chamber Remember who you are!”

*25 Pre

Damon’s head snapped upward. His eyes flickered red, then dark, then red again. His body convulsed

Silas snarled. “Obey me, Damon!”

Lady Duran shouted over him. “You are Damon Hawthorne, Alpha of Silvermoon Pack!”

Damon’s fingers dug deeper into the ground.

His breathing became ragged.

“You are my son! Remember your mate, Aria. Remember Elona, your daughter!”

Something inside Damon snapped. He roared. The sound shook the chamber. The force of it

sent several wolves stumbling backward.

Silas staggered. “No!”

Damon thrashed violently. It was as if two invisible hands were pulling his mind in opposite

directions. Silas’s blood fought Lady Duran’s bloodline.

Damon was trapped between them. I could feel it through the mate bond.

He’s fighting. Lydia sounded hopeful.

“He is.” I pushed myself against the altar.

“Damon, look at me!”

His head turned toward me. For one second, his eyes were completely clear. My heart stopped.

“Aria...” His voice was weak.

“I’m here.”

He looked around. His gaze landed on Joshua. His expression changed. “Joshua.”

He moved. Silas immediately tried to stop him. Damon broke free. He crossed the distance in seconds. His claws tore through the silver chains around Joshua. The metal snapped.

Joshua collapsed forward. Damon caught him before he hit the floor.

“Get out of here, Joshua.” His voice was strained.

Joshua looked up at him.

“Run,” he commanded.

Joshua shook his head. “I can’t leave you.”

“You have to.” Damon shoved him toward the edge of the chamber. “Go!”

Joshua stumbled away. I felt tears burn my eyes. He was back. He was really back.

Then Silas screamed. “You pathetic traitor!”

+26 Points:

His power exploded outward. The backlash hit Lady Duran. She was thrown across the chamber. Her body slammed into the stone wall.

“Mother!”

She dropped to the floor. Blood trickled from the corner of her mouth. Damon froze.

Silas turned toward him. “You see what happens when you resist me?”

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Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 292

“No!” He dropped to his knees, his hands clawing at his head.

Rhein roared inside him. Fight!

Damon shook violently. Then his claws came up. He drove them toward his own head. I screamed.

“Damon, stop!”

He wasn’t trying to hurt himself. He was trying to reach the bond, to sever the link from inside his own mind. His claws raked across his temples. Blood appeared.

Silas stared at him in disbelief. “What are you doing?”

Damon’s breathing became ragged. “I won’t belong...” He dug his claws into his own flesh.

“...to you.”

Silas’s expression turned murderous. “You don’t get to choose.” His hand shot forward. Dark red energy wrapped around Damon.

Damon’s body jerked. The resistance collapsed.

Silas walked toward Damon. His eyes glowed like two pools of blood. “If I cannot control you...” He reached toward Damon’s chest. “...then I’ll empty you.”

My blood ran cold. Silas’s claws pierced the skin over Damon’s chest. Damon roared. Energy began pouring from his body. His Alpha aura, his wolf strength, everything that made him

Damon.

Silas was drawing it out.

Damon’s body began to weaken. His head dropped. His breathing became shallow.

“No.” I pulled against the altar. The runes tightened. Pain ripped through me. My own blood was still being drained. My body was failing. Damon was dying, and I could do nothing.

Aria. Lydia’s voice was barely audible. Don’t let him go.

“I’m trying.”

Try harder.

I looked at Damon. His eyes were closed. His body hung limp beneath Silas’s grip. The mate

bond. I had tried several times earlier. Both times had failed. The membrane had stopped me.

But something had changed. I could feel it. The bond was weak, damaged, but alive.

I closed my eyes and reached inward with everything I was.

“Damon.”

There was nothing. I tried again.

“Damon, find me.”

Silas laughed. “You cannot reach him.”

I ignored him and focused on Damon.

“Find

your mate, Damon.” My heart broke. “I am still here, waiting for you.”

Something moved within Damon.

Lydia gasped. Aria, did you feel that?

I did. It was a tiny, faint thread. I reached for it. This time, there was no wall, membrane, or

resistance.

Silver light suddenly flashed between us. I gasped. The light traveled through the bond, from my chest into Damon. His body jerked.

Silas stumbled backward. “What did you do?”

I opened my eyes. Silver light flowed beneath my skin. Damon’s eyes snapped open. They weren’t red. They weren’t controlled. They were his... dark, familiar, and alive.

“Aria.” His voice broke.

I smiled through my tears. “Damon.”

The silver light intensified. The mate bond exploded back to life. I felt him completely. His fear, his rage, his pain, his love. And beneath everything, I felt Rhein.

Aria. Lydia surged forward. He is completely back.

I laughed through a sob. "Yes, he is."

*25 Paints

The bond pulsed again. I could feel Damon's strength returning through the bond. Not just his. Mine flowed into him, and his flowed into me. Silver light wrapped around both of us.

Silas stumbled backward, shielding his face. "No!"

His vampire instincts reacted violently to the light. His skin began smoking where the silver

energy touched him. He snarled, exposing his fangs.

"What have you done?"

I stared at him. "I did what only a mate could do."

Damon rose slowly. His body was battered, blood covered his face, but his Alpha aura returned, powerful and fierce.

He was no longer controlled. He stepped between Silas and me. His eyes hardened.

"You should have killed me when you had the chance.

Silas stared at him. Damon's claws extended.

"Because now..." His wolf surged beneath his skin. "...you have to face both of us."

Rhein's voice thundered inside my mind. We do this together.

Lydia answered with a fierce growl. Together.

Damon's eyes met mine. I didn't need words to know what he was thinking. We moved at the

same time.

Damon struck first. His fist slammed into Silas's chest. The vampire-altered werewolf flew

backward and crashed through a stone pillar. The entire chamber shook.

Silas recovered almost instantly. His fangs extended. His eyes burned crimson. “You think a

mate bond makes you stronger than me?”

Damon stepped forward. “No.” His claws slid from his fingers. “It makes us harder to kill.”

B

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 293

Aria’s POV

Silas snarled. Then he vanished. I barely caught the movement.

“Damon!” I called out.

He turned. Silas appeared behind him. I intercepted him. Our claws collided. Pain shot through my arm.

Silas was fast. His vampire blood gave him an unnatural speed that made even ordinary werewolves seem sluggish by comparison.

He struck again, his claws slicing through the air where my head had been a heartbeat earlier. I ducked beneath his attack, and Damon lunged at him from the side.

Silas twisted with impossible speed and blocked the blow, his claws clashing against Damon’s.

We had moved beyond the altar area. The ground around us was littered with Silas’s fallen men. Ryder and Noah had taken down several of them, including some vampire-altered werewolves. They were stronger and faster than ordinary werewolves, but none could match

Silas.

He was an Alpha, and the vampire blood coursing through his veins had pushed his strength to another level. Noah and Ryder continued battling the remaining attackers while Joshua had joined the fight, keeping the others from surrounding us.

Damon and I charged Silas at the same time.

I swung first, my claws raking across his shoulder. Silas snarled as dark blood spilled from

the deep gashes.

Then I watched in disbelief as the wounds began closing almost immediately.

I froze for half a second.

He's healing that fast? Lydia's voice rumbled inside my mind, her instincts sharpening with

alarm.

My stomach tightened.

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Silas smiled. "Surprised?" He grabbed my wrist, his grip tightening. "Vampire blood has its

advantages."

Damon slammed into him. Silas released me. I rolled across the floor and immediately got back to my feet.

Lydia growled. He's even stronger than before. You need to stop fighting him like a wolf.

I understood. The mate bond wasn't only connecting us. It was synchronizing us. I looked at Damon. He looked back. No words were spoken. We attacked.

Damon went high. I went low. Silas blocked Damon. I struck his legs. He stumbled. Damon's

claws tore across his chest. Silas roared. His body exploded with crimson energy. The force threw us backward.

I hit the floor. Damon landed beside me. "Are you okay?"

I nodded. “You?”

He smiled faintly. “I’ve had better days.”

Silas charged at us. Noah intercepted him. Their claws collided. Ryder joined. Joshua grabbed one of the guards and slammed him against the wall.

Lady Duran, still injured, forced herself upright and growled at Silas.

Damon’s head snapped toward her. “Mother!”

“I’m fine.” Blood stained the corner of her mouth. “Stop worrying about me.”

Silas roared. His vampire side erupted. His fangs lengthened. His eyes became completely red. Black veins spread across his pale skin.

His claws elongated into something more like talons. He looked like a starving vampire.

He lunged at Noah. Noah barely dodged. Silas slammed into the wall. Ryder attacked. Silas caught him by the throat.

I moved. Damon moved with me. We struck simultaneously. Silas released Ryder. He staggered.

I felt the bond pulse. Damon’s power flowed through me. My bloodline answered. Silver energy exploded from my hands. It struck Silas directly in the chest. He screamed.

+25 Pounds

Smoke rose from his skin.

Silas snarled and charged at us. We met him head-on.

The battle continued. Minutes became hours. The chamber was destroyed around us. Stone

cracked, walls collapsed. The altar shattered. Silas’s men were eventually overwhelmed. One

by one, they fell. But Silas refused to stop.

He kept healing, kept attacking, kept coming back.

The moment the first faint light of dawn began filtering through the broken windows, I saw

the change in his expression.

His confidence vanished. His eyes darted toward the windows, then toward the exits, calculating how much time he had left.

It is almost over. Lydia growled inside my mind.

I tightened my grip on my claws. The sunlight will kill him.

Silas suddenly broke away from Damon and sprinted toward the nearest exit.

“Don’t let him through!” Damon roared.

I moved before he could reach the exit, cutting him off. Silas skidded to a stop and immediately turned in another direction, but Joshua was already there.

“You’re not going anywhere,” Joshua growled.

Silas snarled and lunged at him. Joshua blocked the attack, forcing Silas backward.

Ryder and Noah closed in from the opposite side.

We formed a wall around him.

Silas’s gaze flicked from one of us to another. For the very first time since the battle began, I saw genuine panic in his eyes.

“Move!” he snarled.

“No one is moving. This ends now, Silas,” Damon said coldly.

B

LUCK DR

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 294

Aria’s POV

Silas attacked anyway.

He struck at Ryder, then spun toward Noah, but neither gave him an opening. Joshua intercepted another attempt to break through while I stayed close enough to prevent him from escaping through my end.

The ruined chamber shook around us as the battle continued. Stone cracked beneath our feet. Chunks of the ceiling collapsed, sending dust and debris raining down.

Silas fought desperately, but his movements had changed. He was no longer trying to overpower us.

He was running out of time.

Every few seconds, his eyes returned to the broken windows.

Dawn was coming.

Keep him here, Lydia urged. Don't let him reach the shadows outside.

I know.

Silas suddenly threw himself toward me.

I braced myself and met him head-on. Our bodies collided, and his claws scraped across my side. Pain flashed through me, but I refused to retreat. I drove my shoulder into his chest and sent him staggering backward.

Damon was there before he could recover.

He struck Silas across the face, sending him crashing into a broken stone pillar.

Silas rose immediately, blood running from his mouth.

"You can't keep me here forever!" he snarled.

Damon's eyes hardened. "We don't need forever."

Silas's gaze shifted toward the windows.

His expression twisted. A faint golden glow had begun spreading across the horizon. It was

sunrise.

Silas turned and sprinted for the largest opening in the ruined chamber. Ryder intercepted

him.

He struck Ryder with enough force to send him stumbling backward, but Noah immediately

stepped in. Joshua joined him, and together they forced Silas away from the opening.

“Get out of my way!” Silas roared.

“Not happening,” Noah growled.

Silas looked toward me, then Damon, then the windows.

He understood. We weren’t trying to kill him ourselves. We were keeping him there until the

sun did it for us.

“No,” he whispered.

The first ray of sunlight entered through the broken window. It touched the back of his hand.

Smoke erupted from his skin.

Silas screamed.

I stared as his flesh blistered instantly. His vampire blood fought desperately to heal the damage, but the sunlight burned faster than his body could regenerate.

Silas staggered backward, desperately searching for somewhere the light could not reach.

Another ray touched his shoulder. His skin blackened.

“Move back!” he screamed.

But we didn’t. Damon advanced while Joshua, Ryder, Noah, and I maintained the perimeter, leaving Silas nowhere to run.

“This is the end for you, Silas,” I said.

Silas’s red eyes locked onto mine. For a moment, hatred consumed his face.

Then he smiled. It was the most terrifying smile I’d ever seen. “You think you’ve won?”

Damon stopped several feet away. “You lost the moment you chose to hide behind an altar and waste countless lives for an evil cause.”

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Silas laughed, though the sound came out strained. “You have no idea what you’ve started.”

More sunlight poured into the chamber. His skin cracked. “Vampire clans will come for you.”

His body convulsed as the sunlight spread across his chest. “They will tear through every wolf territory.”

Ash began peeling from his shoulders. “Your packs will burn.” His voice weakened. “Your Alphas will fall.”

I watched him deteriorate, unable to look away.

Silas’s eyes found mine one last time.

“And when they come...” His body cracked again, his flesh breaking apart beneath the relentless sunlight. “Wolfkind will perish.”

Damon stepped closer. “We’ll be ready for when that happens.”

Silas laughed again. Then the sunlight reached his face. His skin split. His body crumbled.

Within seconds, there was nothing left of him but ash scattered across the floor.

Silence followed. For several moments, none of us moved.

I looked toward the ash where Silas had stood. His final words echoed in my mind. The vampire clans would come. Maybe it was a threat, maybe it was a promise. But whatever came next, I wasn’t facing it alone.

I would face it with everyone standing on this ground.

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 295

Aria's POV

The curse Silas left behind had turned every witness into arguing circles.

Damon stood in my study, both palms planted against the polished wood. His jaw was tight,

his eyes cold.

"We strengthen every border immediately," he said. "Our packs cannot afford another surprise

attack. If the vampires are planning something, I want our defenses ready before they make

their move."

Across from him, Noah leaned back in his chair, his expression calm despite the tension thickening around us. He folded his arms over his chest. "And if they aren't planning an attack?"

Damon's gaze snapped toward him. "Then we lose nothing by being prepared."

"We lose manpower," Noah countered. "You would be pulling wolves from patrols, training

grounds, and internal security based on a threat we haven't confirmed. Silas is dead. We don't

even know whether the vampires he mentioned are still acting against werewolves."

Damon's nostrils flared. "You're suggesting we sit around and wait?"

"I'm suggesting we stop reacting emotionally."

The room went silent.

I pressed my lips together. They weren't entirely wrong.

Damon's eyes narrowed. "You want to talk about emotion, Noah?"

Noah's expression didn't change. "I want to talk about facts."

“Enough.”

My voice cut through them. Both men looked at me. I pushed myself away from the wall and

walked toward the table.

The moment I stepped into the center of the room, the tension shifted. Everyone instinctively

straightened. I placed my hands on the table between them. “You’re both right.”

Damon frowned. Noah lifted an eyebrow.

“We need stronger defenses,” I continued. “But we also need intelligence. If we throw every

available wolf toward the borders without knowing where the threat is coming from, we could

leave ourselves vulnerable somewhere else.”

Damon watched me carefully. “So what do you suggest?”

I looked at him first. “You take border reconnaissance.”

His expression hardened slightly. “Personally?”

“Yes. We need someone we trust to assess the borders himself. Not just receive reports from patrols.”

His jaw tightened, but he nodded. Then I turned to Noah. “You take the intelligence network.”

Noah’s eyes sharpened.

“I want every piece of information, every intercepted message, every movement that might be

dismissed as insignificant. Find out what the vampire clan are doing, who they’re speaking to,

and whether Silas had allies outside his immediate circle.”

Noah nodded once. “Understood.”

Finally, I looked toward Ryder. He had been quiet throughout the argument, sitting with his arms crossed while he watched everyone tear each other apart. “You’ll use your commercial

channels.”

Ryder blinked. “My commercial channels?”

“You have contacts across territories that pack intelligence can’t reach. Merchants, transport companies, investors, private security firms. People who hear rumors before they become

reports.”

A slow smile appeared on his face. “You want me to go shopping for secrets.”

“I want you to find out whether any outside powers are moving against us.”

“Much more interesting than shopping.”

I gave him a look. He immediately raised both hands. “Fine. I’ll do it.”

Silas might have died, but the damage he left behind was spreading farther than any of us had anticipated. And I had a terrible feeling we hadn’t even reached the worst of it.

478 Ponts

Later that day, I went to the hospital to visit my father. By the time I arrived, exhaustion had

settled into my bones. I pushed through the doors and immediately caught the scent of herbs, blood, and healing magic.

My father lay beneath the white sheets, his face calmer than it had been weeks ago. Devin stood beside him and looked up when I entered.

“You’re here again.”

I walked to my father’s bedside. “Yeah.” I looked at my father. For months, the curse had wrapped itself around his mind like chains. Every attempt to break it had been met with resistance.

But now... ever since Devin stepped in, things were different. The darkness surrounding him

had almost disappeared.

Devin moved closer. "The residual traces of the curse are essentially gone."

My heart stopped. "What?"

"The curse has been cleared."

I stared at him. "Completely?"

"Almost. There are still faint remnants, but nothing strong enough to maintain the spell. His

mind is beginning to reconnect with itself."

Hope struck me so suddenly that I almost couldn't breathe. I reached for my father's hand.

His fingers were warm.

I closed my eyes and allowed myself to breathe.

He is coming back. Lydia's voice was softer than usual. Our father is coming back.

My throat tightened. I squeezed his hand and thanked the Moon Goddess.

Joshua, my brother, was improving too. The changes were slower, but they were there. Under

the healer's guidance, he had begun recovering more fragments of his memories from before

the brainwashing.

When I entered his room that afternoon, Joshua was sitting beside the window. He turned toward me. "Aria."

I stopped and smiled. "How are you feeling?"

H

+25 Ports

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 296

Aria's POV

Joshua rubbed his temple. "I feel like my head is full of broken glass."

I winced. "That's not exactly encouraging."

He gave me a faint smile. "You always were terrible at comforting people."

I stared at him. Then I laughed. It surprised both of us.

Joshua looked at me for several seconds before his expression softened. "I remember that."

My smile faded. "What?"

"You laughing like that when we were younger." He touched his temple. "We were younger."

You stole something from my room."

I frowned. "What did I steal?"

"My favorite knife."

I stared at him. Then I shook my head. "I did not steal your knife."

"You did."

"No, I only hid it because you were annoying me."

He laughed. The sound nearly broke me.

Lydia purred within me. That's the Joshua we remember. He will regain all his memories soon, I

have no doubt.

I swallowed against the lump in my throat. Yes, he will.

While my family slowly found its way back to me, the world outside was changing. The Silas

affair had ripped open something rotten inside the Werewolf Council.

Several councilors had been exposed as corrupt. They had accepted money, favors, and protection from Silas's organization. Some had been removed. Others had resigned before they could be publicly stripped of their positions.

The Council announced a formal restructuring. The announcement was supposed to reassure the packs. Instead, it made my instincts scream.

I sat alone in my study that night, reading the Council's latest notice for the third time. The

Council shall restore order and stability among the territories of wolfkind.

My fingers tightened around the paper. Order and stability. Those words sounded harmless,

but they weren't.

Lydia growled. They are coming.

I stared at the document. You think so too?

Why else would they suddenly care about stability?

My stomach tightened. They want Grayson land. That was what they wanted. They had not

declared it openly, but I knew how Council politics worked.

The Grayson land wasn't simply property. It was the heart of the Grayson family, our territory,

our history, and our future.

If the Council decided that my family was too weakened to govern it, they could claim they

were acting in the name of wolfkind. They could appoint an overseer.

They could challenge our authority, and if we failed to establish enough political support before the restructuring was complete, they could strip my brother and me of our inheritance

entirely.

I pushed away from the desk. “No, I can’t let that happen.”

Lydia’s claws scraped against the inside of my mind. They won’t take our home.

“No, they won’t.” I stood and walked toward the window. Joshua had nearly died because of the war surrounding that land. My father had nearly lost his mind because of it.

I had rebuilt it with my own hands. I wasn’t going to watch the Council take it from me because a group of corrupt wolves suddenly decided they knew what was best for my family.

The door opened, and I turned.

Damon stood in the doorway, his eyes immediately sweeping over me. His gaze lingered on

my face.

“You look worried. Is something troubling you?”

I sighed. “You read me quite well these days. I do have a lot on my mind.”

He closed the door behind him and crossed the room. When he stopped in front of me, his expression had turned serious.

“I can tell. What happened?”

Instead of answering, I handed him the Council notice. Damon unfolded it and read through

the contents. His brows drew together.

“I saw this earlier today.”

“They’re reorganizing the territories, Damon.” I folded my arms. “I believe they’re going to

come after Grayson land.”

He lowered the paper and met my gaze. “We won’t let them do that.”

“You say that like it’s simple.”

“It isn’t.” He reached for my hand, and I let him take it. His thumb brushed gently across my

knuckles.

“But you have more standing than you realize, Aria. You rebuilt Grayson territory. You played a

crucial role in defeating Silas. You protected your father, and you even saved Joshua. You’ve

accomplished more in the past few months than most wolves manage in a lifetime.”

His voice softened.

“The Council cannot simply overlook that. Grayson territory belongs to your family, and you

have earned the right to protect it.”

My chest tightened.

For a moment, I wanted to believe him. I wanted to believe that everything I had done would

be enough to keep the Council from taking what belonged to my family.

But deep down, I knew better.

Good intentions and accomplishments weren’t enough.

I needed power.

If I wanted to guarantee that Grayson territory remained ours, I needed something the Council could not easily strip away.

Then a thought struck me.

The Grayson territory was enormous. Large enough to sustain an entire pack. My family already had the land, the properties, the resources, and the people.

What if we became a pack of our own?

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 297

Aria's POV

I looked at Damon. "I want to turn the Grayson territories into an independent pack."

His brows furrowed.

"My family has enough land and resources to break away from Silvermoon Pack and stand on our own. If Grayson territory becomes a pack, the Council will have a much harder time claiming it."

Damon remained silent for several seconds, clearly considering the idea.

Then his expression changed. "That's actually a smart move, Aria."

"Really?"

"It could work." His grip tightened slightly around my hand. "Once Grayson territory becomes

an established pack, its land will have the protection that comes with pack sovereignty. But

there's one obvious question."

I already knew what he was going to ask. "A pack needs an Alpha."

His eyes widened slightly. "You want to become the Alpha?"

I hesitated. "Is that a bad idea?"

A smile slowly spread across his face. "Aria, if Grayson territory becomes a pack, there is no

one I would consider more suitable to lead it than you."

I stared at him. He shook his head, almost amused by my doubt.

“You’ve shown more leadership in the past few months than most Alphas I know. You have

wolves willing to follow you into battle. Men who have already risked their lives for you and

would do it again without hesitation.”

I knew exactly who he meant. The rogue wolves.

“They could become the foundation of your pack,” Damon continued. “And fortunately, the land I gave them to settle on is close to Grayson territory.”

My eyes widened.

Damon’s smile deepened. “I’ll give that land to the Grayson Pack.”

“Damon, you don’t have to...”

“I want to, Aria.” His voice was firm. “Consider it my token of support.”

Emotion tightened my throat. “Thank you, Damon.”

“You’re welcome, Alpha Aria.”

I couldn’t help laughing. “Alpha Aria,” I repeated, shaking my head.

“It suits you.”

My smile faded as another thought surfaced. “There’s still something else I’ll need.”

“What?”

“Political allies.”

Damon nodded. “You already have three Alphas who will stand behind you against all odds.

You’re not starting from nothing.”

I drew in a slow breath. He was right. I had survived too much to surrender now.

I would build alliances. I would strengthen the Grayson Pack. I would turn my family’s

territory into something the Council could not simply claim with a stroke of a pen, and if the

Council intended to strip me of my inheritance, they were about to learn one thing.

They had chosen the wrong woman to underestimate.

Just as expected, a few days later, a proposal reached my desk from the Council, stating that my family should give up our land. I refused to do that. I tore the document in half and

dropped the pieces into the wastebasket. There was nothing to discuss.

Lydia stirred inside me. You did good, Aria. We can't let them have our territory.

I leaned back in my chair. That's right, we can't.

I do think they deserve worse than shredded paper.

A reluctant smile tugged at my lips. My wolf had become increasingly opinionated lately.

Unfortunately, she wasn't wrong.

+75 Pointa

The Grayson territory had become more than land. I wasn't going to lose it. If the Council wanted proof that the Grayson Pack was strong enough to govern itself, I would give them something they couldn't ignore.

We would rebuild and become powerful enough that removing us would have political consequences.

Damon handed over ownership of the land he had promised to me. The rogue wolves I'd taken in also finished identity registration and basic training within the week.

They had also been divided by strength and temperament into four departments: Guard, Logistics, Reconnaissance, and External Relations.

One weekly pack affairs meeting was held where they reported their progress, while Joshua

kept the records and my father sat in the corner like a silent, watchful mountain.

When major decisions came up, he spoke once, low and final, and the room listened.

My father's body still needed the wheelchair, but the curse had been completely broken, and

his senses were back. His reunion with Joshua after he had fully recovered was a very emotional one.

They had both unanimously supported my decision to make our territory a pack and become

its Alpha, promising to help however they could.

They're settling, Lydia murmured inside my head as we watched them, satisfaction curling

through the bond. The land is starting to smell like us again.

The pack grew stronger every week, but as our strength increased, another problem became

impossible to ignore.

My mate, or rather, the absence of an established one.

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Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 298

Aria's POV

It started with innocent comments. Then questions, then suggestions, then expectations. At

first, I ignored them. I couldn't ignore them forever.

The subject came up during meals, during meetings, during casual conversations, even during patrol discussions.

"Ms. Aria, have you considered taking a mate?"

I nearly choked on my drink. I gave him a flat look. “Don’t ever bring up that topic again.”

The wolf immediately lowered his head. “Understood, Ms. Aria.”

Unfortunately, the matter wasn’t confined to pack members. Damon made sure of that. He claimed he was staying near the border to assist with defense.

Technically, he wasn’t lying. The problem was that his definition of border defense involved

moving into a residence close enough to my territory that I could see him almost every day.

It was true that I already shared a mate bond with Damon, but I had made it clear to him that

it didn’t count. It didn’t mean we were mates, not in the way that truly mattered.

I had only needed his help to stabilize my bloodline power, and mating with him had allowed

me to accomplish that.

Now, I needed to choose the man who would stand beside me for the rest of my life, the man

I would willingly accept as my true mate.

Ryder wasn’t much better. He didn’t invade my territory. Instead, he invaded my supply schedule. Every few days, another shipment arrived. Food, medical supplies, building materials, weapons. Sometimes things I had never requested.

Then there was Noah. He traveled frequently between Whitemoon and Grayson territory under the excuse of trade negotiations. He asked questions about my plans, he listened, he never pushed, and somehow, that made his presence even harder to ignore.

The worst part was that everyone seemed to have an opinion. One late night, my father sat

outside with me. He said he wanted to have a heartfelt talk. I already knew what it was about.

He proceeded to tell me that I needed to get a mate.

“You don’t have to love any of them,” he said, his voice rough from the long day. “But the Council needs to see a bond that can’t be broken with politics if they are to grant your wish.

You’re Alpha in everything but name right now, Aria. A fated mate or even a chosen one gives

them something they can’t ignore.”

I stared into space. “I’m not a bargaining chip.”

“No. You’re not. You’re more valuable than any chip, my child. Getting a mate doesn’t make

you a bargaining chip.”

Lydia stirred, restless. They mean well, Aria, but the choice is ours.

Joshua was worse.

One evening, he leaned against my office door. “You need to think about getting a mate, Aria.”

I looked up from my documents and dropped my pen. “Why is everyone obsessed with this?”

“Because you’re trying to establish an independent pack.” He covered the distance between

us and sat in the seat opposite me. “The Council is watching you, Aria. Having a mate could

strengthen your political position.”

I leaned back. “I don’t want to choose a mate because he’s politically useful.”

“No one said you should.”

“You’re all implying it.”

Joshua sighed. “Aria, I’m not asking you to choose someone you don’t love. All I am asking is

for you to stop pretending the decision doesn't matter."

His words hit harder than I expected. I looked away because he was right. It did matter. A mate wasn't a political contract. It wasn't an alliance. It wasn't a bargaining chip. It was supposed to be the person my wolf chose above everyone else. The person tied to my soul by the fated mate bond.

Joshua soon left my office and shut the door.

I stared at the closed door. There were three men, three possible futures, and an entire pack

waiting for me to choose one. The pressure was becoming unbearable.

I had fought vampires. I had fought rogues. I had fought Claudia. I had fought for my father's

life and my family's land. But somehow, choosing a mate felt like the most dangerous battle

of all.

That was because this time, I couldn't rely on strength. I couldn't rely on claws. I couldn't rely

on an army. I would have to trust my heart, and I wasn't sure I was ready to do that.

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 299

Aria's POV

I had spent weeks rebuilding the Grayson Pack, strengthening our borders, and trying to stay ahead of the Werewolf Council. But one question kept returning to me.

What exactly is in my blood that makes everyone so obsessed with it? Why had my power reacted to the altar when no other wolf could even approach it? Is it just because my mother's family had been the owners of it, or is there some other reason?

I needed answers, so I went to my mother's family estate.

When I arrived, the head of my mother's family was waiting for me. He seemed different this time. Before Silas's destruction, when I had visited him, he had been guarded, and I had to threaten him before I could get answers to my questions.

This time, however, I didn't have to use force. He was more receptive. He was sitting in the library when I entered, his eyes following me carefully.

He asked me to sit, and I did.

He wore an amused look on his face. "First, congratulations on defeating Silas. I clearly underestimated you." He leaned forward. "Now tell me, why have you come?"

I folded my arms. "I want to know more about my bloodline."

His expression changed. The amusement disappeared. "Your bloodline is not entirely werewolf."

My heart stopped. Lydia went completely still.

"What?"

He leaned back. "The Grayson bloodline began with an ancient union between wolves and a vampire lineage."

I stared at him. "No, you are joking, right?"

"No, I speak the truth."

"My family is a werewolf bloodline," I said.

428 fr

"Your family became a werewolf bloodline."

The distinction hit harder than I expected.

I shook my head. "You're saying my ancestors were vampires?"

"Not exactly. The original bloodline was mixed."

He stood and walked toward an old bookshelf. "Centuries ago, there was a vampire lineage

unlike the clans that exist today. They possessed abilities that allowed their blood to interact

with supernatural energy in unusual ways.”

He pulled out an ancient book. “Their blood mixed with that of an early wolf lineage.”

He opened the book. The pages were covered with faded symbols and drawings.

“Over generations, the vampire traits weakened. The werewolf side became dominant.”

I stared at the illustrations. Two figures stood beneath a moon. One had claws. The other had fangs. Between them was a symbol I recognized immediately. My breath caught. “The altar.”

He nodded. “That symbol predates most of the modern packs.”

I stepped closer and stared at it.

“The reason you can resonate with the power at the altar is because your blood still carries

remnants of that ancient lineage.”

I looked at my hands. The memories came rushing back. The altar, the energy that had surged through me, the way the power had responded to my blood, the way Silas had looked

at me. It suddenly made sense.

Lydia’s voice was low. That explains why the altar responded to us.

Yes.

The old man’s gaze hardened. “The vampires are also interested in

I looked at him. “What do you mean?”

your blood.”

“Your blood is rare.” He paused. “To certain vampires, it is more than rare. It is valuable.”

My stomach twisted. “Why?”

“Because your blood can act as a key.”

“A key to what?”

He shook his head. “We don’t know.”

His answer frustrated me. “You don’t know?”

“The ancient records are incomplete. Some were destroyed, while others disappeared.”

“Convenient.”

He ignored my accusation. “But we know enough to understand why vampires are interested

in your blood.”

I stepped closer. “Silas wanted it to activate the altar on the Grayson land and gain power.”

“Silas was not acting alone.”

My heart sank. “What?”

“The clan behind him knew what you were.”

I stared at him. “They weren’t hunting me because of the Grayson land?”

“No.” His voice was grim. “They were hunting you because of your blood.”

The room suddenly felt too small.

Lydia growled. They want us? Then let them come.

My hands curled into fists. I wasn’t nearly as confident as she sounded. “How powerful can

this bloodline become?”

The old man studied me. “That depends on you.”

“What does that mean?”

“If

you master it, you may possess abilities far beyond those of an ordinary wolf.”

“And if I don’t?”

His silence answered me before he spoke. “You won’t merely fail to protect your people. You

could become the reason they are destroyed.”

I stared at him. My chest tightened. “You’re saying my power is dangerous?”

“Power without control always is.” He walked toward the window. “Your blood has already

awakened. Silas’s actions accelerated something that might otherwise have taken years.”

+25 Paints

I remembered the moments when my power had erupted. The force that had sent enemies flying. The strange energy that had surrounded me.

“Can I control it?”

“Yes, you can, but it will take a lot of work on your end.” He leaned forward. “The werewolf

packs as they stand right now are a pile of loose sand.”

He shook his head, as if disappointed. “Territories jealous of one another. Alphas who refuse

to share power or information. There is no unified command or combined strength. Against a

true vampire offensive, they would scatter.”

“You must prepare on both fronts, your own power and the politics that bind the wolves.

Otherwise, everything you have rebuilt will dissolve the moment a greater threat arrives.”

Lydia’s voice was low and fierce. We will not be quarry. We will not let them take what is ours.

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 300

Aria's POV

A few days after I returned from visiting my mother's family, Ronan called for a pack meeting. He walked into the meeting hall with Joshua beside him.

My father no longer needed a wheelchair. He could now walk with assistance, and although his movements were still slow, seeing him on his feet felt like a miracle.

The room fell silent.

Every wolf turned toward him as he slowly made his way to the front.

He stopped in front of the pack. "I called this meeting because there is something we need to make official."

My stomach tightened. I glanced at Joshua, and he gave me a small nod.

Ronan turned toward me. "Aria led this family through the worst period in our history." The room remained silent. "She defended our territory, rebuilt our forces, and protected every one of us."

He smiled. "She negotiated with neighboring packs, faced vampires, and survived attacks that would have killed most wolves." His voice strengthened. "And she did all of it while the head of this family lay unconscious."

Ronan stepped closer. "Now that she has decided to have our territory recognized as a pack, I propose that we support Aria Grayson in becoming formally recognized as the Alpha of the Grayson Pack."

The room erupted in approval. Wolves began pounding their fists against the tables. Some stood, while others howled.

The sound hit me with such force that Lydia surged forward inside me.

Everyone accepts us.

I swallowed. They already did a long time ago.

Yeah, but not like this.

I looked around the room. These wolves weren't cheering for a title. They were acknowledging what I had already become.

Ronan raised his hand, and the room gradually quieted. "This is not about giving my daughter

authority she doesn't already possess." His eyes met mine. "It is about recognizing the authority she has earned."

My throat tightened.

Then Joshua stepped forward. "I support the proposal."

I looked at him. He smiled. "You might be wondering why I am not taking this position since I

am the only son and the first child. But I will tell you why."

He paused. "Everything my sister has achieved these past few months has been absolutely mind-blowing. She has accomplished things that most wolves would have considered impossible."

He smiled. "I wouldn't even be standing here if it weren't for my sister."

His gaze moved across the room before returning to me. "Since she declared her intentions

to make our territory a pack of its own, I have watched her closely these past few weeks, and

I can proudly say there is no one better suited to rule this pack than Aria."

"Joshua..."

He raised a hand. "Let me finish."

A few wolves chuckled.

Joshua smiled. "I'm good at organizing records, strategy, and administration, and that's what

I have been doing these past few weeks. I want to publicly announce that I will maintain that

position while supporting the Alpha in any way I can."

My eyes burned.

Lydia whimpered inside me. This is what family is all about.

I swallowed hard. “Thank you, Joshua.”

Joshua’s smile widened. “Don’t make me regret it.”

A laugh moved through the room. For a moment, everything felt right. Then reality returned,

because this wasn’t simply a decision for the Grayson Pack. The Werewolf Council had the final authority, and that was where the real battle would begin.

Later that evening, I sat in my office, staring at the Council’s requirements for me to become

the Alpha of the Grayson Pack. For my appointment to be approved, two-thirds of the Council

members had to vote in my favor.

It sounded simple, but it wasn’t.

I had never heard of a female Alpha holding a traditional pack seat. Not once. Not in the history books. Not in the Council archives.

Werewolf society had always been built around male Alphas. Female wolves could be powerful. They could become Lunas, advise their Alphas, command warriors, and even lead

in battle, but the Alpha seat? That was still considered a man’s position.

My fingers tightened around the document.

Lydia growled. They’re going to fight us.

That’s right.

Then we fight harder.

I leaned back in my chair. “This isn’t a battlefield.”

Everything is a battlefield, Aria.

I couldn't argue with that.

The door opened, and Damon walked inside. He immediately noticed my expression.

"What happened?"

I held up the document. "I applied for the Alpha position of the Grayson Pack."

Damon's eyes widened slightly as he approached the desk. "And?"

"The Council says I need two-thirds approval from the Council members."

Damon's jaw tightened. "Many will resist."

I looked at him. "You think they'll reject me?"

"I think conservative Council members will find every reason possible to oppose you. They

+25 Parts

could argue that the Grayson Pack lacks a legitimate Alpha, and you already know why."

My blood went cold. "To claim the Grayson land."

"Exactly."

I stood and walked toward the window. That was exactly what I had feared. The Council

wouldn't have to openly declare war on me. They wouldn't need to.

They could simply reject my application, question my legitimacy, and claim that the Grayson Pack required external oversight. Then they could take control of everything I had built.

Lydia snarled inside me.

They won't take it. We won't let them.