

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha – Mindlinks 4 |

Chapter 4

Aria's POV

By the time the banquet ended, it was already past ten at night.

Damon stood by the door waiting for **me** his expression dark.

I reached for the passenger door—and froze the instant my eyes caught the *back* seat through the window.

A pale grey cardigan lay carelessly draped over the leather seat. On the edge of the front console sat a small, delicate rhinestone hair clip.

Not mine. I knew exactly whose it was.

I let my hand drop before it reached the door handle. "I'll call my own car."

"Get in. Grandfather's still watching us." Damon slid into the driver's seat, his voice edged with a tired

impatience.

"I said I'll call my own car." I stepped back.

A few seconds of dead silence stretched between us. Damon rolled down his window, his dark eyes **fixed** on my pale face. After a moment, as if remembering the way I'd retched at the table, his tone softened, just barely. "Get in. If you're pregnant, you need to see a doctor to confirm it—"

"That's not necessary." I cut him off coldly. "I'm not pregnant."

"Not pregnant? Then what was that back there?" His gaze darkened, laced with the usual suspicion. "Aria, how exactly do *you* plan to prove you're not just messing with me?"

Something inside me—something that had held for two whole years, through a miscarriage, through violence, through everything—finally snapped, right there, in the face of his same tired doubt.

"You want proof?"

I laughed, tears blurring my eyes even as I forced them back down. Before he could react, yanked the car door open and grabbed Damon's right hand, slamming it down against myself—against the wound beneath my skirt, still bleeding, still raw, still burning.

Damon's POV

My mind went completely, utterly blank

What met my palm wasn't the softness of **fabric**—it was something thick, hot, and stomach turning Blood The smell of it flooded the cramped cabin instantly, thick and metallic

I sat frozen behind the wheel, pupils blown wide, still reeling, when her voice cut through—flat, hollow,

dead

'I was in a car accident today I got checked at the hospital I'm not pregnant
Looking at the crimson smeared across my palm, panic twisted in my chest

+25 Parts

Lept my mouth, but at that exact second, my phone buzzed violently against the dashboard.

Claudia.

"Damon?" Her voice came through, crying, fragile. "My stomach suddenly hurts so much... I'm scared."

At the sound of Claudia's voice, my hand flinched back on instinct, pulling away from Aria.

And in the next second, before I could even process what had happened, she *was* already *out* of the car.

I couldn't focus on a word Claudia was saying. My mind was full of Aria. A restless panic I couldn't explain rose up in me, and Rhein was even worse—pacing, agitated.

The blood on my palm—Aria's "accident"—was already cooling, drying at the edges.

I told myself it was just an injury. Grayson women were tough.

I told myself to stop thinking about her.

But the tight, aching pressure in my chest wouldn't ease.

Go to our mate. Comfort her. Stay with her.

Rhein growled inside me, restless, claws dragging against my nerves.

There it was again. That absurd, infuriating truth, surfacing yet again.

Mate? No. She wasn't.

She **was** the daughter of the man who'd killed my best friend. She was the wedge driven between me and Claudia. She was the single greatest mistake of my life.

I didn't know why the Moon Goddess had bound us together, but I would never accept it.

She didn't deserve to be my mate.

Quiet, I snapped at him, hard.

And yet with her scent still thick in the car around me—I couldn't stop the memory from surfacing. Two years ago. Our mating night.