

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 301

Akia's POV

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The pressure to choose a mate started again. It came from every direction, especially from my father and Joshua. It was always disguised as concern, strategy, and duty.

I was told it would strengthen my position, secure my future, and help me win the Council's

support.

Every time I entered a council meeting, I could almost hear the same unspoken question hanging over the room. Who will stand beside you? As though I wasn't enough on my own. As though being

an Alpha without a mate made me incomplete.

I sat behind my desk in my study, staring at the stack of documents in front of me without reading a single word.

Lydia stirred inside me. You look quite distracted and angry.

I just don't understand why Father and Joshua can't let me be. Why can't they understand that I can do just fine without a mate?

She snorted softly. I understand how you feel, and frankly, I can understand why they are being persistent. They are only looking out for you the best way they know how.

I sighed. I knew that too.

It is true that a fated mate could strengthen a wolf's power. A powerful mate beside me could also

influence how other packs viewed my leadership. In the eyes of many old-fashioned wolves, a

woman cannot rule as Alpha.

Now that I had risen to challenge that status quo, the Council wanted me to get a mate. In their

words, it would provide stability, protection, and power.

Unfortunately, I didn't want that.

I leaned back in my chair and closed my eyes. The pressure had even reached my family. Every other day, I was being told how settling down would protect me.

"I won't do it," I whispered.

Lydia's presence settled against my consciousness. Then don't. It is ultimately your choice.

It sounded simple, but the Council didn't make anything simple.

There was a knock on my door.

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"Come in."

The door opened, and Viktor stepped inside. He held several files against his chest, but the moment he looked at me, his expression changed. "You look bothered. Is something wrong?"

"I'm just tired of everyone thinking they know what's best for me."

He raised an eyebrow. "What happened?"

I let out a sigh and leaned forward. "My father and brother are pressuring me again about choosing

a mate. They think having one beside me will secure enough votes from the Council

Viktor's jaw tightened. "And what do you think?"

"I think it's insulting."

He was quiet.

I stared at him. "Everyone keeps telling me that I need someone. That I need a mate to strengthen my position. That I need an Alpha beside me if I want the Council to recognize my authority."

“I’m guessing you don’t think so.”

“No, I don’t.” The answer came instantly.

Viktor walked closer. “Then don’t choose one.”

I looked at him. “It’s not that simple.”

“It is.”

I frowned. “You don’t understand how the Council works.”

“I understand exactly how they work.” His voice was calm, but there was something firm beneath

I went still. “What do you mean?”

“They’re not asking you to choose a mate because you’re weak.” He placed the files on my desk.

“They’re asking because they don’t know how to control a woman who doesn’t need one.”

The words struck me harder than I expected. I stared at him.

Viktor continued. “You’ve rebuilt this territory. You’ve stabilized the pack. You’ve strengthened the defenses. You’ve restored the supply chain. You’ve handled disputes that would have broken

weaker leaders.”

He gestured toward the room. “You’re doing all of that without a mate standing over your shoulder.”

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My throat tightened.

“So why should you suddenly need one now?”

I couldn’t answer. He stepped closer. “You don’t.”

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Something inside me shifted. Everyone else had been telling me what I needed. Viktor was the first person who had looked at me and reminded me that I already had enough.

“You really believe I can win the Council vote without a mate?”

“I don’t believe it.” His eyes met mine. “I know it.”

I smiled. His words moved me more deeply than I wanted to admit. Every single day, Viktor gave

me more reasons to trust him. He had earned that trust without demanding anything in return.

Lydia stirred. He gets us like no one else does. I couldn’t have asked for a better Beta.

Me neither.

I held his gaze. “Thank you.”

He gave me a small smile. “You don’t have to thank me for telling you the truth.”

“I do, and I’ll tell you why. Everyone else keeps telling me what I should become.”

I lifted my eyes to his. “You’re the only one reminding me that I don’t have to become anything for

them.”

Something softened in his expression. “You only need to become what you want to be.”

My chest tightened. For a moment, the room felt too quiet.

Then I stood. “Come with me.”

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Chapter 302

Axia’s POV

His eyebrows lifted. "Where are we going?"

"To the training grounds."

He looked suspicious. "Why?"

"I want to spar with you, maybe learn a thing or two."

A faint grin appeared on his face. "Are you challenging me, Alpha?"

"Maybe."

His scent spiked with a mix of amusement and competition. "Very well then, let's do that."

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The training grounds were empty when we arrived.

Viktor stepped onto the training circle and rolled his shoulders. "Are there any rules?"

"Not at all."

His grin widened. "That's dangerous. I will be careful. I wouldn't want to harm my Alpha."

"Don't hold back, Viktor. Show me what you've got."

I lowered myself into a fighting stance.

Lydia immediately came alive. Careful, Aria. Don't get too excited. We have seen him fight, and without our bloodline power, we are no match.

I am here to learn from him.

Very well then, let's do this.

I smirked. The fight started. Viktor moved. Fast. Much faster than I expected. I twisted aside as his fist cut through the air where my head had been.

"You're quick."

"You haven't seen anything yet."

He attacked again. I blocked. Our arms collided with enough force to send a vibration through my

bones. I countered with a kick.

He caught my ankle. I twisted, using his grip to propel myself forward. He released me just before I

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could drag him down. I landed lightly.

My wolf growled with excitement. Do that again.

I smiled. You're enjoying this.

So are you.

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He lunged. I met him halfway. Our bodies collided. His arm wrapped around my waist for balance as I caught his shoulder.

For a brief second, we were too close. I could feel his breath against my cheek. Our eyes met. Something strange flickered between us. It was not a mate bond, nothing like that. Just

awareness.

I stepped back. "You're hiding your strength."

His expression became unreadable. "So are you."

Before I could respond, I heard footsteps approaching from behind the training grounds. Then a familiar scent reached me. My body reacted before my mind did. My heart stumbled.

Lydia went completely still. Damon is here.

I turned. He stood at the edge of the training ground. His gaze was fixed on me. More specifically, it was fixed on Viktor's hand, which was still resting lightly against my waist.

His expression changed. The warmth vanished from his eyes. His jaw clenched. Even from several yards away, I could feel the sudden spike of Alpha power rolling from him. Rhein was awake and

furious.

Lydia whispered. He is jealous.

Damon's eyes moved slowly from Viktor to me. Something primal flashed across his face. Then he stepped forward. He took one step, then another.

Viktor removed his hand from my waist and turned toward Damon. "Alpha Damon."

Damon didn't answer him. His eyes remained on me. "Aria."

The way he said my name sent an unwanted shiver down my spine.

I straightened. "Damon."

His gaze dropped briefly to the space between Viktor and me before returning to my face. "What exactly are you doing?"

I frowned. "Training with my Beta."

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His nostrils flared. "I can see that."

"Then why ask?"

His expression hardened. "I wanted to hear you say it."

I crossed my arms. "And why does that matter to you?"

Damon's wolf growled. Rhein's presence pressed against the edges of my senses.

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My heart slammed against my ribs. I hated that my body reacted to him before my pride could

intervene.

Lydia growled back. He doesn't get to claim you. You already made it clear you are not ready to

choose a mate.

Damon took another step toward us. Viktor subtly moved between us. That was a mistake. Damon's eyes narrowed. "Move."

Viktor didn't. "I'm her Beta."

"And I'm her mate." The words came out low and dangerous. The atmosphere changed instantly.

My pulse accelerated. I stepped forward. "Enough, both of you."

Both men looked at me. I glared at Damon. "You don't get to walk into my territory and start issuing commands."

His eyes darkened. "I'm not issuing a command."

"Then what are you doing?"

His gaze shifted toward Viktor again. "Trying to understand why I arrived to find another man

holding you."

I stared at him. Then, despite myself, a small smile tugged at my lips.

Damon noticed. His expression became even darker. "You think this is funny?"

"A little."

His nostrils flared. I stepped closer. "You don't own me, Damon."

His eyes locked onto mine. For a moment, neither of us moved.

Then his voice dropped. "I know." The intensity in his gaze made my breath catch. "But that doesn't mean I enjoy seeing another man touch you."

My smile disappeared. Lydia went silent, and so did I. Because there was something in his voice

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that wasn't anger. It was jealousy. Raw, instinctive, and completely beyond his control.

Also, judging by the way Rhein was snarling beneath his skin, Damon wasn't doing any better at controlling his wolf.

This is going to be a problem, Lydia whispered.

I couldn't disagree.

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Chapter 303

Aria's POV

Damon's eyes remained locked on me. I could still feel the tension rolling off him in waves, his

Alpha aura lingering around the training ground. I knew he was still affected by what he had seen,

but I had no intention of allowing the situation to turn into another argument.

I glanced at Viktor, then back at Damon. "I should probably introduce you properly. Damon, this is

Viktor. He's my newly appointed Beta."

Viktor inclined his head respectfully. "Alpha Damon."

Damon studied him for a moment before giving a restrained nod. "Viktor."

There was still tension between them, but I refused to feed it. Instead, I gestured toward the

territory surrounding us.

"Viktor has been helping me manage the pack. He's been handling supply distribution, patrol

schedules, construction, and external negotiations."

Damon's gaze moved across the territory. The rebuilt structures, the workers moving between them, the new training facilities and the reinforced borders were all visible from where we stood.

"You've done all this since I left?"

"I didn't do it alone." I looked toward Viktor. "I've had good people helping me."

Damon was quiet.

I could almost see the realization settling over him. He had been away for weeks, dealing with

matters within his own pack and traveling overseas. During that time, my territory had continued

moving forward without him.

"I have been trying to reach you, Aria" he said quietly. "My calls went unanswered."

"I'm sorry. I've been busy."

"Busy enough that you couldn't call me back?"

I frowned. "Damon, I was rebuilding an entire territory. I had pack matters, Elona, border security, and a dozen other responsibilities."

He sighed. "I know."

The unexpected softness in his voice made me pause.

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He looked at me again. "I can see that now."

Something in his expression had changed. The irritation was still there, but beneath it was something else. Recognition, perhaps. Maybe even regret.

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During the battle against Silas, I had restored my mate bond with Damon. For a brief moment, I had allowed that connection to open completely. I'd felt him with a clarity that had almost

overwhelmed me.

Rhein had surged against Lydia with such force that it had felt as though the two wolves had

become one.

When the battle ended, I had expected something to change. Maybe Damon had expected it too

Perhaps he thought restoring the bond meant I would suddenly run back to him. That I would become softer, more dependent, more willing to let him into every corner of my life.

But that hadn't happened.

The brief reconnection during the battle hadn't swallowed me the way it once might have. My bloodline power had grown stronger, denser, a second heartbeat beneath the mate bond. I could feel Damon more clearly now, but I remained myself.

There was no instinctive submission. No desperate need to close every distance between us. No overwhelming urge to surrender my choices simply because he was my mate.

The bond was a connection now, not a shackle and I would never again allow a mate bond to erase the edges of who I was.

My priority at the moment was Elona, my pack, my territory and my future.

If a mate would be part of that future, it would be because I want one and not because some Council members and everyone around me think I need one. Also, If that ever happens, he would not define it for me.

Damon expected us to return to him. He still seems disappointed.

I know, and frankly, that's his problem.

Lydia's amusement brushed against my mind. I like you like this.

I smiled faintly. So do I.

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Chapter 304

Aria's POV

Damon continued spending time in the Grayson territory over the next few days, but things

between us had changed.

He still found reasons to be around me. Sometimes it was pack business. Sometimes it was border security. Other times, he simply appeared with that familiar expression that told me he wanted to spend time with me.

But he no longer forced his way into my decisions. He watched, he listened and, surprisingly, he

waited. I wasn't sure what to make of it.

Lydia seemed amused by the entire situation. He is learning patience.

I smiled faintly as I reviewed the latest patrol reports. Or he is just pretending to.

You like that he is trying.

I didn't answer. That was answer enough for her.

I was about to close the file when the door suddenly opened.

Viktor stepped inside, his expression serious.

I straightened. "What happened?"

"We lost contact with the northern patrol."

My stomach tightened. "How long has it been?"

"At least twenty minutes."

I pushed back from my desk. "How many wolves?"

His brows furrowed. "There were six of them."

Damon, who had been standing near the window, immediately turned toward us.

“Where were they last seen?”

Viktor placed a map on my desk and pointed toward the northern boundary.

“Near the old forest road.”

“Have you tried contacting them?” Damon asked, looking up from the map.

Viktor held his gaze and nodded. “Yes. I tried several times, but I couldn’t reach them.”

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My instincts sharpened. “Send another patrol.”

Viktor’s gaze shifted to me. “I already did. The second patrol hasn’t reported back either.”

A heavy silence filled the room.

Lydia stirred uneasily. Something is wrong.

“How long has the second patrol been gone?”

Viktor glanced at his watch. “Exactly ten minutes.”

I stood immediately. “Then we go look for them.”

Damon nodded. “I’m coming too.”

Viktor grabbed his jacket. “I’ll lead the search.”

I picked up my weapons. “We’ll split up. Damon and I will take the northern route. Viktor, take the western trail and check whether they moved toward the river.”

Viktor nodded. “Understood.”

We hurried out of the study. We had barely reached the main courtyard when I saw several wolves approaching from the opposite side of the territory.

I stopped. Damon and Viktor stopped beside me.

The six missing patrol wolves were walking toward us. All of them were perfectly fine.

I stared at them in disbelief.

Viktor was the first to speak. "Where have you been?"

The patrol leader looked confused by the question. "On the northern route."

"You didn't answer any of our calls."

He winced. "We couldn't. We lost our communication device."

My brows furrowed. "How did that happen?"

He rubbed the back of his neck. "One of the men dropped it when we crossed the stream. We went

back to search for it."

Damon frowned. "Where is the second patrol?"

The leader pointed behind him. "They're on their way. They joined us in the search for the device."

A moment later, the second patrol emerged from the trees.

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I stared at all of them. "What happened to the communication device?"

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The first patrol leader held it up. "It was stuck beneath a fallen branch. We found it, but by then, we had already realized everyone was looking for us."

I let out a breath.

Viktor shook his head. "You should have sent someone back."

"We assumed the packhouse had been informed about the situation through the second patrol

the first patrol leader explained.

The second patrol leader lowered his head. "I'm sorry, Alpha. I thought we would find the device quickly and return home."

I closed my eyes briefly. It had been a false alarm.

Nothing had happened.

No attack. No ambush. No enemy hiding in our territory. Just a broken line of communication and

a chain of assumptions.

Lydia released a relieved sigh inside me. They're safe. Everyone is safe.

I felt the tension finally leave my body.

Thank the Moon Goddess.

I looked at the patrol wolves. "Next time, if your communication device fails, send someone back immediately. I don't care how far you have to travel."

"Understood, Alpha."

I nodded.

Damon glanced at me, and I could see the relief in his expression too. I looked once more at the

wolves standing safely in front of me.

Only then did I allow myself to breathe properly.

For a few terrifying minutes, I had imagined the worst, especially after the threats Silas had made before his death. But everyone was safe.

That was all that mattered.

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Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 305

Axia's POV

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One evening, I stood beside the training grounds, watching Viktor spar with several warriors. His fighting style was efficient and controlled as usual.

There was no wasted movement. No unnecessary aggression. He moved like someone who had spent years learning how to kill without making a sound.

Lydia stirred. He is a very strong man.

I smiled. I agree.

I watched him disarm one of the warriors. Then he looked in my direction. "Is something wrong,

Alpha?"

I shook my head. "No."

He walked over. "You've been staring."

"I was only studying your fighting style."

His eyebrows lifted. "You are still curious?"

"Very much so."

He smiled. "Then let me show you one more time."

He stepped back onto the training ground. I followed. We sparred again. This time, I paid closer

attention.

I blocked a punch and twisted his wrist. He countered. I ducked, and his arm passed over my head.

I spun and caught his shoulder.

He laughed. "You've improved since the last time we sparred."

"I was always good."

He smiled. For a moment, we stood there, breathing heavily. There was no awkwardness or hesitation, just familiarity.

I realized something then. I trusted him, and that was not because he was my Beta. It wasn't even because he had proven himself useful.

It was because somewhere along the way, Viktor had become the person I instinctively looked for when something went wrong. The person I knew would stand beside me without asking for

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anything in return.

The person whose presence made the weight of leadership feel lighter. He had become my most reliable partner.

The realization settled quietly inside me. So quietly that I almost missed it.

Lydia didn't. You trust him.

I smiled. Yes, more than anyone.

Damon, Ryder, and Noah each maintained contact with me in their own ways. Damon called, Ryder sent messages, Noah appeared whenever his schedule allowed, always with some perfectly reasonable excuse for being in Grayson territory. Beneath all of it was the same unspoken

question.

Which one will you choose?

I was beginning to hate that question. I didn't like the fact that everyone seemed to believe my future had to be decided around a mate.

Damon was the most direct. He had never been one to hide what he wanted.

Ryder approached things differently. He was more playful, more persistent, always finding some excuse to make me laugh.

Noah was quieter and more calculated. He never pushed. He simply appeared, offered assistance, discussed pack affairs with me, and left me wondering whether his calmness was genuine or merely another strategy.

Three Alphas, three different approaches, and me in the middle of it.

Lydia sighed. This is exhausting.

Tell me about it.

All you need to do is choose one, and the other two will get the memo.

I smiled faintly. That's tempting, but I do not need a mate.

Soon, the entire pack started talking about it too. At first, it was whispers, then discussions, then opinions. I heard them during patrol meetings, in the dining hall, and even outside the chambers.

"Our Alpha needs to settle on a mate."

"A strong Alpha would give the pack greater political weight."

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"She already has three strong Alphas hoping to become her mate. Why can't she just pick one of

them?"

"With the elections coming, we need stability. She needs to get a mate."

Every time I heard any of these kinds of discussions, something inside me tightened.

One evening, I walked through the main hall and heard two older pack members talking near the windows. "The Grayson Pack needs a clear alliance, especially now."

I stopped. They hadn't noticed me. "With the Council reorganizing, we can't afford to appear

divided."

"They're going to reassess the territories."

"Exactly, my point."

My hands curled into fists.

Lydia stirred. Here we go again.

I stepped forward. The two wolves immediately noticed me. Their faces went pale.
“Alpha.”

I looked between them. “If you have something to say about my leadership, you can say it to my face.”

One of them swallowed. “We weren’t criticizing you. We were only worried about the pack.”

I turned away, but their words followed me. It was as though everything I had accomplished suddenly meant nothing because I didn’t have an Alpha standing beside me.

Three days later, news arrived. I was in my office when Viktor entered, wearing a worried expression.

“What happened?”

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Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 306

Axia’s POV

Viktor closed the door behind him. “The Council has announced the election for its vacant seats.”

I straightened in my chair. “When will it be?”

“In two weeks.”

I nodded. “Alright.”

He didn’t respond. I studied his expression for a moment before narrowing my eyes.

“Is there something else?”

“Yes, there is. A few selections have already been made.”

My stomach tightened.

“Alpha Damon, Alpha Ryder, and Alpha Noah have all been selected as representatives of their

packs on the Council.”

I wasn’t surprised. They were all strong Alphas, and with the Council’s restructuring, it made sense that they would occupy some of the vacant seats.

I and a few other pack Alphas would probably be elected based on merit and influence on the day

of the election.

I stared at Viktor and forced a small smile. “That is very much expected.” My brows furrowed as I

studied the troubled expression on his face. “Then why do you look troubled?”

Viktor sighed. “The thing is, they were all sent invitations to the election. So was every other Alpha

who is expected to be elected that day.”

A bitter laugh escaped me. “They didn’t invite me.”

He shook his head. “No.”

I pushed my chair back and stood. “After everything I did? After Silas?”

Viktor didn’t answer.

“I helped stop that bastard. I fought beside the very people who are now being rewarded with

Council seats.” My voice shook with anger. “And they didn’t even invite me?”

Viktor’s jaw tightened. “No, they didn’t.”

I turned toward the window. Outside, the territory I had fought to rebuild stretched beneath the

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afternoon sun. After everything I had done, I was being shut out of the Council's decision-making

tier.

Lydia's growl filled my mind.

They are afraid of you. They believe you cannot be controlled.

I clenched my hands.

Or maybe they think we're weak.

We are not weak.

I closed my eyes. She was right, but politics didn't care about strength alone. The Council controlled alliances, trade, territory recognition, and disputes between packs. Now, with the

restructuring, its authority would be even greater.

Being excluded wasn't merely an insult. It was dangerous.

Without a representative on the Council, the Grayson Pack would have no voice in decisions that could affect our future. We could be marginalized, our influence diminished, and our land could

even become subject to reassessment.

I opened my eyes.

I couldn't let that happen.

Damon's POV

I arrived at the Council headquarters after being summoned by the Council's Chief Elder. I wasn't

the only one. Noah and Ryder had been summoned as well.

Rhein stirred beneath my skin as we walked through the doors of the Council. I don't like this place.

Neither did I. But there were battles we could not fight with claws and fangs. The vampire threat had changed everything.

The Council had always had influence over our packs in certain designated areas, but most Alphas treated it as an inconvenience rather than a necessity.

I had been one of them. So had Ryder and Noah. None of us had ever wanted a seat at that table.

Now, with Silas dead and the vampire threat no longer something whispered about in dark corners, we had finally understood something our predecessors had refused to accept.

If wolfkind remained divided, we would fall one pack at a time, and there was no guarantee vampires would stop at the wolves.

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Ryder walked beside me, his hands tucked into his coat pockets. His expression was unusually

serious.

"You think they'll actually offer us seats?" he asked.

"I think they want us to believe we're being offered seats."

Noah glanced at me. "What do you think they actually want?"

I looked toward the towering doors at the end of the corridor. "Control."

Noah's expression hardened. "I agree."

Ryder exhaled. "Wonderful. Nothing says unity like three Alphas walking into a room full of elders who already want to put collars around our necks."

I gave him a sideways look. "Try not to provoke them."

He scoffed. "I'm always respectful."

Noah snorted. I almost laughed.

Then the doors opened. A Council guard stepped aside. “Alpha Damon Hawthorne. Alpha Ryder Blackwood. Alpha Noah Hargreaves. The Chief Elder is waiting.”

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Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 307

Damon’s POV

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We entered together. The Council chamber was larger than I remembered. Seven elders sat

behind a long, crescent-shaped table carved from blackwood.

The Chief Elder sat in the center. Elder Marcus. His silver hair was tied behind his head, and his

pale eyes seemed capable of seeing through every lie a wolf could tell.

His gaze settled on me first. “Alpha Damon.”

I inclined my head. “Elder Marcus.”

He looked at Ryder and Noah before gesturing toward the chairs opposite him. “Please sit.”

We did. Elder Marcus folded his hands on the table. “Before we discuss the purpose of this meeting, I believe congratulations are in order.”

No one spoke. His eyes moved between us.

“Silas is dead because of you all. Your actions prevented a catastrophe. Had Silas succeeded, the consequences would have extended far beyond the territories directly involved.”

Ryder leaned back. “We didn’t do it alone.”

“I am aware.” The elder’s gaze shifted toward me.

“Still, Alpha Damon, your actions during the final confrontation deserve particular recognition.”

I frowned. “What actions?”

“You chose justice over blood.”

The room became quiet. I knew exactly what he meant. Silas was my father, and I had fought

against him.

“An Alpha who allows family ties to cloud his judgment becomes a danger to his own pack,” Marcus continued. “You demonstrated that the law of wolfkind can come before personal

attachment.”

I leaned forward. “I did what needed to be done.”

“And that is precisely why the Council believes you are worthy of greater responsibility.”

Ryder glanced at me. Noah’s expression remained unreadable.

Elder Marcus continued. “The Council wishes to establish a stronger alliance between the major

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packs. With the vampire threat growing, wolfkind can no longer afford fragmented leadership. We

want the strongest Alphas in our territories involved in the decisions that affect us all.”

His eyes moved between us. “That includes the three of you.”

I stared at him. “You’re offering us Council seats.”

“Yes.” He nodded. “We unanimously decided to do that.”

For a moment, no one spoke. It was almost absurd. None of us had ever wanted this. Yet here we

were.

I glanced at Noah. He gave the smallest shrug. Ryder looked amused. Then my thoughts returned

to Aria.

I straightened. "If we're discussing leadership, there's someone else who should be sitting at this

table."

Marcus's expression changed. "Who is that?"

"Aria Grayson."

There was silence. I didn't look away.

"She helped destroy Silas. She risked her life for wolfkind. She stood against a threat that would have overwhelmed most Alphas," I continued. "She deserves a seat."

Ryder nodded. "I agree."

Noah's expression hardened. "So do I."

Marcus looked uncomfortable. "Aria Grayson's contribution has not been overlooked."

"Then give her the recognition she deserves."

"It is not that simple."

"Why?" I asked.

The elder hesitated. That hesitation told me more than his words ever could. I leaned forward.

"Why, Elder Marcus?"

He sighed. "The reason is that her power is unlike anything the Council has dealt with."

Rhein's hackles rose. They're afraid of her.

I couldn't agree more.

"You are afraid of her," I said aloud.

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Marcus's eyes narrowed. "Concern is not the same as fear."

"It looks the same from where I'm sitting."

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His expression hardened. "Aria Grayson possesses extraordinary power. Her bloodline abilities are unstable, difficult to predict, and considerably stronger than those of most Alpha wolves."

"That isn't a reason to deny her what is due her."

He leaned forward. "It is when the other packs are already uneasy."

My hands curled into fists beneath the table. "Uneasy?"

"Some believe elevating Aria to the position of Alpha would upset the balance between the packs!

"Let me understand something. Because they're afraid of her, you intend to keep her beneath

them?"

Marcus's voice became firmer. "The Council cannot ignore the concerns of the other Alphas."

I laughed once, without humor. "Then what exactly does the Council stand for? Justice or appeasement?"

Ryder shifted beside me. Noah's eyes had gone cold.

Marcus studied me for several seconds. "The Council stands for stability."

"Then let me make this simple." I leaned closer. "Aria will be the first female Alpha of her generation, whether you approve it or not."

Marcus's expression darkened. "The Council will not pass the Alpha vote."

I stared at him. “You can’t stop her.”

“We can refuse to recognize her authority.”

“Then the Grayson Pack will recognize it.”

“If that happens, the Council will place the Grayson Pack under continuous surveillance.”

The words landed like a threat.

Rhein snarled inside my mind. Tell him to try.

I forced my wolf down. “You would watch her every move?”

“Yes, until the Council is satisfied that her power can be controlled.”

I shook my head. “She doesn’t need to be controlled.”

W

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“Every powerful Alpha must be accountable.”

“Accountability is different from imprisonment.”

Marcus ignored the accusation. “Regardless of how hard Aria strives, the Council will not approve

her Alpha status under the current circumstances.”

My chest tightened. I hated every word coming from his mouth. But then he continued,

“There is, however, another possibility.”

I narrowed my eyes. “What possibility?”

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Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 308

Damon's POV

+25 Pointé

Marcus looked between me, Noah, and Ryder. "If Aria Grayson were to form a mate bond with a

recognized Alpha, the Council's position could change."

That was not news. Every one of us already knew it was the condition the Council had given Aria. I thought he wanted to say something else.

The elder continued. "A fated mate bond would provide her with a stabilizing connection. The strength of the bond would also place her power within a recognized hierarchical structure."

His gaze moved between us. "I suggest she mate with one of the three most powerful Alphas."

My fingers dug into the arms of my chair. "You're suggesting she mate with one of us."

He nodded. "That is correct. We want her to mate with you, Alpha Damon, or Alpha Noah, or Alpha Ryder. Then, maybe we can reconsider having her rule as Alpha of the Grayson Pack."

I opened my mouth to answer. The meeting room doors suddenly flew open. Every wolf inside turned toward them, and there she stood, Aria.

Her hair fell around her shoulders, her eyes burning with an intensity that made the air itself seem to change. She had obviously heard what the Chief Elder said.

Lydia stirred inside her. I could feel the faint pressure of her presence even from where I sat.

Aria stepped into the chamber. Her gaze moved from the Council to me, then to Noah, then to Ryder. Finally, she looked directly at the Chief Elder.

Her voice was calm. "Interesting."

My heart slammed against my ribs. Marcus went pale.

Aria took another step into the room. "I think I heard enough."

Aria's POV

For several seconds, nobody moved. The Council chamber was so quiet I could hear my own heartbeat. It was slow and steady, far too calm for the fury burning through my veins.

Lydia was anything but calm. They want to bind us.

Her claws scraped against the inside of my mind.

They want to put a leash on our power.

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+25 Pomté

I stared at the Chief Elder. “And my answer is no. I would not do that.”

My voice was flat.

The Chief Elder’s brows drew together. “Aria, I think you misunderstand what was...”

“I understand perfectly.”

I stepped farther into the chamber. Every wolf at the table watched me. Some with curiosity,

others with unease. A few looked downright afraid.

Good. At least they were honest about one thing. They were afraid of me.

I turned my attention to the Chief Elder. “You don’t want to recognize me as an Alpha. You want to

contain me.”

“That is not what the Council is proposing.”

“Then explain what exactly the Council is proposing.”

He hesitated.

I laughed bitterly. “You can’t, because that’s exactly what you’re proposing.”

Damon rose from his chair. “Aria.”

I glanced at him. His expression was tense, his jaw tight. I knew that look. He was already preparing to protect me.

Something inside my chest twisted. It was not because I didn’t appreciate him, but because I was tired of being treated like someone who needed to be handled instead of someone who deserved

to be heard.

I turned back to the elder. “You called my power unstable. You said the other packs were uncomfortable with me. Then you offered me a solution.” I made quotation marks in the air with my fingers. “Bond yourself to an Alpha, and maybe we’ll reconsider.”

My lips curled. Those words tasted disgusting.

“You won’t recognize my strength unless a man stands beside me.”

A murmur moved through the chamber. I ignored it.

“You won’t recognize my authority unless I’m someone’s mate.”

The anger inside me finally broke through. “And you expect me to be grateful?”

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Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 309

Aria’s POV

+25 Paint

The Chief Elder’s face hardened. “Aria, no one is questioning your ability to rule a pack on your own, but you need to have a mate for stability.”

“You can dress it up however you want.” My voice rose. “You can call it stability. You can call it hierarchy. You can call it protection.” I stepped closer. “But I know what it is.” I pointed at the

Council table. “It is fear.”

The word echoed through the chamber.

Lydia lifted her head inside me. Go on, say it.

“You are afraid of what happens when a woman possesses enough power that she doesn’t need permission from men like you.”

Several elders bristled. Damon’s eyes widened slightly. Ryder looked like he was trying very hard not to smile. Noah remained completely still, but there was something approving in his gaze.

The Chief Elder struck his palm against the table. “That’s enough.”

I looked directly at the Chief Elder. “You said the Council won’t approve me as Alpha unless I get a

mate.”

“That is the Council’s current position.”

“Fine.” I smiled. “Then I don’t need your approval.”

A stunned silence followed.

His expression changed. “You cannot simply disregard the Council,” he said.

“Watch me.” I turned toward the doors. “The Grayson Pack will survive without the Council’s

approval.”

“Aria.”

I stopped. The Chief Elder’s voice had become colder. “If you walk away from the Council, you may find yourself without the resources necessary to defend your territory.”

I looked over my shoulder. “Then I’ll build my own resources.”

The chamber went silent.

I continued, "I will build the Grayson Pack with my own hands. I will make it strong enough that no

| G GW

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Council elder can threaten it. I will train our warriors, protect our borders, and strengthen our

alliances."

My voice hardened. "And when the vampires come, we will fight." I took another step toward the door. "I don't need charity disguised as recognition."

Then I left.

The doors slammed behind me. I barely made it halfway down the corridor before I heard fast, heavy, familiar footsteps. I didn't need to look back.

It was Damon.

"Aria, wait."

I kept walking. "Don't, Damon. This is not a good time."

"Just listen to me."

"I listened enough in there."

He caught up with me. "Then let me explain."

I stopped so abruptly that he nearly walked into me. I turned. "What exactly are you going to

explain?"

Damon's chest rose and fell. "However bad you think the Council's terms are, they still have resources we need to fight against the vampire threat."

I stared at him. "They just insulted me, said I'm too powerful and I need a mate to make me acceptable, and you're still defending them."

His jaw tightened. "I'm not defending them."

"Then what are you doing?"

“Trying to make sure you don’t throw away the one thing we currently need.”

He stepped closer. “The vampire threat isn’t gone, Aria. Silas is dead, but there are still vampires

out there. We don’t know how many. We don’t know what they’re planning. The Council has intelligence networks, military resources, ancient archives, border agreements, healers,

weapons...”

“What exactly is your point?”

“My point is that without Council authorization, the Grayson Pack has limited legal standing.”

I folded my arms. “I don’t care.”

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“You should.” His voice hardened. “If they refuse to recognize your pack, hostile packs could challenge your territory. They could claim your borders are illegitimate. They could refuse to send Warriors when the vampires attack.”

“I’ll handle it.”

“You can’t handle everything alone.”

That sentence made something inside me snap.

“I am not asking to handle everything alone!” I stepped closer. “I’m asking you to understand me.” My voice shook. “Do you even know what I wanted from you?”

His expression softened. “Aria...”

“Even after the bond is restored, you’re still the same. Still deciding what I need. Still arranging my life like I’m some fragile woman who has to be protected and managed.”

His jaw flexed. Gold flickered at the edges of his irises, Rhein pressing close.

“I’m trying to keep you and your people alive.”

“I don’t need to be kept,” I shot back. “I need to be recognized and respected. I need someone who understands that I am not a liability to be contained. That my strength is not a problem to solve.”

He still doesn’t see it, Lydia snarled. He smells the danger and only thinks of cages.

Damon’s voice dropped. “I’m not trying to contain you...”

“Then stop treating me like one of your pack wolves who needs an Alpha’s permission to breathe.”

His wolf surfaced. I could feel Rhein’s presence through the bond, restless and agitated.

Our mate is hurting.

Lydia snarled. Then stop making her hurt.

Damon took another step. “Aria, please.”

I shook my head. “Not now, Damon. I need some space.”

Damon opened his mouth. A new voice cut through the corridor.

“She said she needs space.”

I turned. Viktor stood several feet away.

DIG GW

M

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 310

Akia’s POV

Viktor stood several feet away. His expression was calm.

Damon immediately stiffened. “Stay out of this.”

Viktor’s eyes moved to him. “I’m not interfering. I’m preventing you from making this worse.”

Rhein growled. Who does he think he is?

Damon's shoulders squared. "Viktor."

Claim

His Alpha pressure rolled through the corridor. The air became heavy. I felt it immediately. My skin

prickled.

Viktor didn't move, not even an inch. Then his own aura rose. The pressure hit Damon head-on. The

corridor seemed to contract around them.

My eyes widened. What the hell?

Viktor's aura collided with Damon's. Neither yielded. The floor beneath their feet creaked.

That power... Lydia whispered, suddenly intent. That is not ordinary Beta strength.

I stared at Viktor. His power was immense. It was clearly not ordinary wolf strength. It was

stronger than it should have been, almost at Alpha level.

Damon's eyes narrowed. "Are you challenging me?"

Viktor's expression remained calm. "No." His voice was almost casual. "But if you keep pressing

her, I'll stop you."

Damon's power surged again. The lights overhead flickered. My heart jumped.

"Enough!" My voice cracked through the corridor.

Both men froze. I stepped between them. "Stand down, both of you."

Damon's jaw clenched. "Aria..."

"I said stand down."

His eyes remained locked on Viktor for another second. Then his pressure withdrew. Viktor did the same. The corridor suddenly felt breathable again.

I looked at Viktor. I had questions. A lot of them. Who was he really? Why was his strength strong enough to match Damon? And why had I never sensed the depth of it before?

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I didn't have time to uncover it at that moment.

turned away from Damon. "Come on, Viktor."

Clar

He nodded. I started walking. Viktor followed beside me. Behind us, I felt Damon's stare like a

brand between my shoulder blades, but I didn't look back.

The moment we returned to the safe base, I knew I couldn't let the matter with Viktor go unanswered. The image of him standing against Damon wouldn't leave my mind. Neither would

the sheer force of his powerful pressure.

Viktor had matched Damon, not resisted him, not survived him. He had matched him. That

shouldn't have been possible.

Lydia prowled restlessly inside me. He is hiding something. We need to uncover it.

You are right.

I led Viktor through the corridor and into one of the smaller meeting rooms. The moment the door shut behind us, I turned to face him. "We need to talk."

Viktor leaned against the wall. "I figured."

"It is about your power."

His expression didn't change. "I know."

I crossed my arms. "Who exactly are you?"

Viktor pushed himself away from the wall. "My name is Viktor. That's the part you already know."

"I asked who you are."

He looked at me for a long moment. Then he sighed. "I was born the bastard son of a pack's

Alpha."

That surprised me.

Lydia lifted her head. An Alpha's son?

Viktor continued. "He was not a powerful Alpha. Not one whose name meant anything beyond his

own territory. But he ruled his pack, and I was his second son."

"What happened?"

"My elder brother was his legitimate heir." His mouth twisted bitterly. "But I was stronger."

I frowned. "You were stronger than the heir?"

DIGW

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Clary's

"Yes, very much stronger." The bitterness in his voice deepened. "My father noticed. So did my

brother."

I already knew where this was going.

"My brother saw me as a threat." Viktor looked away. "He was afraid that when our father died, the

pack would choose me instead of him."

I waited for him to continue.

Viktor's eyes hardened. "Soon enough, my brother accused me of trying to steal his inheritance!

"Was it true?"

"No." His jaw tightened. "I never wanted his position. I wanted my own territory. My own place." He laughed quietly. "I was young enough to believe wanting something different wasn't the same as wanting what belonged to someone else."

I understood what he meant. "How did your father respond?"

"He believed my brother."

My chest tightened. "Your own father?"

"Blood doesn't always mean loyalty."

The words settled heavily between us.

Viktor continued. "I was driven out, and I became a rogue for years."

He gave a humorless smile. "You already know that a rogue has no territory, no Alpha, no pack protection, no one to answer for him when other wolves attack. I learned quickly that strength doesn't matter if no one accepts you."

Lydia's attention sharpened inside me.

Rejection that long... it starves the wolf.

Viktor's expression darkened. "The longer I stayed rejected, the more my power locked down. It

never manifested cleanly, always unstable and half-choked. I learned to keep it buried so no one

would notice."

Lydia sighed. That's so sad.

His expression softened slightly. "When I joined the Grayson Pack and became accepted, my

strength started coming back, and eventually, it stabilized."

I stared at him. "Just because you were accepted?"

DIG W

O

Clark

“It didn’t happen immediately. It took time. My wolf had learned to survive without a pack. It didn’t

trust anyone.”

understood that too well. “You had to relearn how to belong.”

Viktor’s gaze met mine. “Exactly.”

The room became quiet.

Lydia’s voice softened inside my head. He’s telling the truth.

I looked toward the door. “Come with me.”

DIG N

O

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 311

Aria’s POV

Claim

Viktor followed me. We walked into the main hall, where several of the rogue wolves were

gathered. The moment we entered, their attention shifted toward us.

I looked at them. “How long have you known Viktor?”

One of the wolves stepped forward. “I’ve known him for years.”

“You knew him before Silas?”

“Absolutely.”

“Did he tell you his story?”

The wolf nodded. “He did.”

Another stepped forward. “We knew where he came from.”

“Tell me about it,” I said, wanting to know if his story would corroborate what Viktor had already

told me.

The wolf glanced at Viktor, sympathy evident in his eyes.

“He was an Alpha’s illegitimate child. His elder brother felt threatened by him and accused him of plotting to take his place. Because of that, Viktor was banished from his pack.”

I sighed quietly. Their stories were the same.

My gaze shifted to Viktor. “Why didn’t you tell me all of this?”

He shrugged. “You didn’t ask.”

That sounded fair.

One of the wolves spoke again. “Viktor never lied to any of us about his past. We lived beside him for months before Silas took us. He was already struggling with his wolf even then.”

Another nodded. “That’s right. His power was unstable.”

“Very unstable,” someone else added. “Sometimes he could barely shift.”

Viktor’s expression remained neutral, but I caught the flicker in his eyes. It was a mixture of

humiliation and pain. I knew that look.

I studied him for a moment longer. The way he stood. His shoulders were squared, but not aggressively. His eyes were steady, but not challenging.

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Claim

He didn't carry himself like a man angling for power. He looked like someone who had finally been

given permission to stand upright again.

Something shifted in my chest.

I knew that feeling.

His path had not been exactly like mine. Mine had been different, but the shape of the recovery

was the same.

I had walked through that same stage when I began rebuilding myself, when the Grayson name stopped being a curse and became something I could finally claim as my own.

I saw that same transformation happening in Viktor now.

The same recalibration. The same cautious testing of a power that had been suppressed for far

too long.

I exhaled slowly, allowing the last of my suspicion to loosen its grip.

I dismissed the others with a nod. They returned to their tasks, leaving Viktor and me alone again.

"You didn't believe me," he said.

I studied him. "No, I didn't. But I do now because their stories matched yours."

He nodded. "That's fair."

Viktor became indispensable before I realized it was happening. At first, it was small things. I would walk into the strategy room and find the reports I needed already arranged across the table.

The maps would be marked with the areas I had been considering. Supply figures would be separated by urgency, cost, and availability.

Sometimes, I would open my mouth to ask for something, only to find Viktor already placing it in

front of me.

“You were looking for this.”

I stared at the document in his hand. “How did you know?”

He shrugged. “You’ve been staring at that section of the map for the last ten minutes.”

I took the report. “You’re getting too observant.”

A faint smile tugged at his lips. “Someone has to be.”

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I rolled my eyes, but I couldn’t stop the smile that threatened to appear.

Lydia purred inside me. We like him. He makes life so much easier for us.

I ignored her. She was right. Viktor made my life easier and more efficient. Whenever I had a difficult decision, he didn’t tell me what to do. He simply placed the possibilities in front of me.

Clai

He never pressured me. Never tried to take control. He simply understood how my mind worked.

And because of that, I began trusting him even more.

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H

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 312

Axia's POV

Clar

I was in my office going over some documents with Viktor when a knock sounded on the door. One

of the guards stepped inside.

“Alpha Aria, Damon is here.”

My shoulders immediately stiffened. Of course he was.

“Where is he?”

“The main hall, Alpha.”

I sighed and pushed myself to my feet.

Lydia growled softly. He is here again? He is becoming irritating.

I almost laughed. You finally agree with me.

I walked into the main hall and found Damon standing near the long table with two of his men.

His presence alone seemed to alter the atmosphere of the room. His Alpha aura pressed lightly

against the air. It was restrained but unmistakable.

I stopped several feet away. “What is it this time?”

His eyes narrowed slightly. “Good afternoon to you too.”

“Damon.” I sighed.

He exhaled. “I’ve reviewed the patrol reports from the northern border, and I have discovered the

current patrol routes are inadequate.”

I folded my arms. “They were designed by my men and approved by me.”

“They leave a blind spot near the western ridge.”

“No, they don’t.”

“They do.”

I stared at him. He stared back. The tension between us immediately thickened.

Damon stepped closer and lowered his voice. “I’m not trying to interfere with your authority, Aria.

I’m trying to prevent an attack.”

“I’m telling you there is no immediate threat.”

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He shook his head. “You can’t be certain about that.”

“know my territory.”

“I, on the other hand, know border defense.”

Cla

My jaw tightened. This was exactly what I had been dealing with for a while now. Damon called it cooperation. I called it interference.

“I have already let you alter the patrol schedules twice,” I said. “You don’t get to do it a third time.”

His expression hardened. “I am only making necessary changes for your own good!

“I won’t let you do so this time.” The words came out sharper than I intended.

I turned toward Viktor. “Have the patrol routes reviewed again. If there is actually a vulnerability, fix it. If there isn’t, leave them exactly as they are.”

Viktor nodded. “Understood, Alpha.”

Damon's gaze shifted to him. Something dark flickered in his eyes. "You're putting him in charge of your security decisions now?"

I looked directly at him. "He is my Beta. I'm putting someone I trust in charge of decisions that

concern my territory."

His jaw tightened. I knew exactly what he was thinking, but I didn't care.

Damon wasn't the only one.

Ryder had been doing the same thing with territory development. Every time I approved a construction project, he appeared with another recommendation about supply allocation.

He insisted that certain resources should be redirected because of potential shortages between the packs. His arguments were always logical, and his intentions sounded reasonable, but they consistently pushed beyond the boundaries I had set.

Noah was no different. His interference came wrapped in diplomacy. From Council alliances to trade agreements to mutual protection arrangements.

Every proposal was presented as something that would strengthen my position, but each one required me to surrender some measure of control, and I was done allowing it.

The following morning, Ryder arrived with another set of documents. I didn't even bother sitting

down.

"What do you want?"

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He placed the papers on the table. "These are supply redistribution proposals."

shook my head. "No."

He blinked. "You haven't even looked at them."

“I don’t need to.”

“It’s a strategic adjustment, Aria. The allocation would benefit both our packs.”

“Then apply it to your pack, Ryder.”

His eyebrows drew together. “I’m trying to help, but you keep rejecting almost everything.”

“I don’t need your help, Ryder. My pack is doing just fine.”

Silence followed. Ryder slowly picked up the documents. “You’ve changed.”

I met his eyes. “No. I’ve simply stopped letting everyone else make decisions for me.”

Claim

He said nothing. When he finally left, Viktor stepped into the room. He glanced toward the closed

door. “That went well.”

I gave him a dry look. “You think so?”

He smiled. “You were only doing what you feel is best for the pack.”

I couldn’t help smiling back. I loved the fact that Viktor never challenged me just for the sake of challenging me. He understood when to speak and when to remain silent.

Later that afternoon, Noah arrived. He carried another proposal regarding a potential Council

alliance.

“No, I am not doing that.”

His expression changed. “Aria, this could strengthen your standing with the Council.”

“I said no.”

“Why exactly?”

“Noah, please let me be! I’m tired of everyone deciding what my pack needs.” I snapped.

He stared at me for several seconds, then turned around and left.

The pattern settled in without effort. Every time Damon, Ryder, or Noah pushed past the line I had drawn, I shut the door and handed the decision to Viktor instead. He never questioned the authority. He simply executed.

I felt the shift inside myself, the growing ease of relying on him, the certainty that he would

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anticipate the next need before I named it. It was more than convenience.

Claur

There was an excessive trust forming. It was sharp and unexplained, and I couldn't yet see where it

came from.

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Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 313

Aria's POV

Claim

I decided to go on a border patrol with Viktor and a few of my men. The moment I was halfway through the Northern Ridge, Lydia's ears perked inside my mind.

Something is wrong, Aria.

I slowed my steps.

The forest was too quiet. There were no birds, not even the distant rustle of small animals moving through the undergrowth. The silence pressed against my skin, setting every instinct in me on

edge.

I scanned the trees around me, one hand resting near my weapon. “Stay alert,” I told the patrol

members behind me. “Something doesn’t feel right.”

Lydia growled softly. We’re being watched.

I barely had time to react. A metallic click came from somewhere ahead. Then the forest exploded. Several silver bolts tore through the trees.

“Everyone get down! It’s an ambush.”

I threw myself behind a large rock as another projectile struck the ground where I had been

standing. Pain shot through my body even though the weapon hadn’t touched me.

Silver. Lydia recoiled. Silver... There’s too much silver.

My heart hammered. The warriors scattered, taking cover behind trees and rocks, but they didn’t

stay down for long.

Two of them immediately shifted positions to flank the clearing, placing themselves between me

and the line of fire.

“How many are there?” one of them shouted.

Another peered around the trunk. “One, two, three...” There was more movement between the

trees. “At least ten!”

Just then, a projectile slammed into the ground. I flinched as a pulse of suppression magic rippled through the clearing. My knees nearly buckled.

“What the hell?”

Lydia snarled in pain. They’re suppressing us.

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G W |||

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Clar

I gritted my teeth. The devices attached to the silver projectiles were emitting a constant suppression field. It wasn’t simply silver. They had designed the weapons specifically to interfere With wolf power.

My fingers curled into claws. I tried to draw on my bloodline power. I could feel my power surging, stronger than it had ever been, but the weapon suppressed it.

The silver field was choking my power, preventing me from using it.

“They knew exactly what they were doing.”

A warrior crouched beside me, shielding my body with his own as another bolt whistled past. “Alpha, what do we do?”

“Stay behind cover,” I ordered.

“We can’t hold them for long.”

“I know.”

Another silver projectile struck the tree. Wood splintered beside my face. I ducked. Two warriors broke from cover to draw the attackers’ fire toward themselves, giving me a narrow window to

move.

“They’re driving us toward the ravine.”

I looked toward the attackers. Their movements were too organized. They weren’t ordinary mercenaries. They moved like trained warriors, like hunters who had rehearsed this exact

battlefield.

Lydia growled. The Nightshade Clan.

My stomach tightened. The pattern was familiar. The Nightshade Clan had a reputation for coordinated strike formations and precision attacks. I'd studied their combat records, the spacing

and the rotation.

The way they forced opponents toward predetermined kill zones and restrained them with weapons was almost identical.

Another volley came. We ducked.

"They're not trying to kill us immediately," I said. "They're trying to contain us."

The moment the words left my mouth, something snapped around my wrist. I looked down. A silver restraint device had launched from beneath the brush. I tore at it. Pain shot through my arm.

Lydia screamed. Aria!

IG W

O

Clar

I bit down hard enough to taste blood. The suppression field intensified. My strength disappeared almost completely.

One of the attackers stepped into view. "Take the Alpha alive."

My blood ran cold. "They know who I am."

The warrior beside me raised his weapon and stepped in front of me without hesitation. "They won't take you. Not while I'm standing."

A figure suddenly crashed into him. He flew backward. The attacker came through the trees. He was too fast.

Another warrior lunged to intercept, buying precious seconds even as a silver blade grazed his

side.

I prepared to fight despite the silver burning through my wrist. Then a body slammed into the

attacker.

It was Viktor.

He drove his shoulder into the man's chest and sent him crashing into a tree.

"Viktor!"

He turned toward me. "Can you move?"

"My power is suppressed."

He looked at the restraint around my wrist. His expression hardened. "Don't pull against it."

"Why?" I asked.

"Because the more you fight it, the stronger the suppression becomes."

Another projectile flew toward us. Viktor grabbed me and dragged me behind a rock. The projectile struck the ground where I'd been standing.

Behind us, the remaining warriors closed ranks, forming a wall between the attackers and our position.

Viktor crouched beside me. He looked through the narrow gap between the rocks. His eyes moved rapidly across the terrain. "There's an opening over there."

I frowned. "Where?"

"Thirty meters east."

I looked. There was a narrow slope down the forest, then another ridge.

IG N

O

"We'll never make it."

“We will. The others will hold them here.”

“Viktor, that’s suicide for them.”

“They chose this, Alpha. Protecting you is their duty, and mine.”

M

DIG W

O

Clar

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 314

Axia’s POV

Before I could respond, Viktor rose to his feet. “Stay behind me.”

I grabbed his arm. “Viktor, if you go out there, they’ll target you.”

Clark

“I know, but I need to do this.” His expression softened as he looked at me. “My duty is to protect

you.”

He pulled his arm free. Behind him, the warriors held their line, snarling and striking at anything that

came too close, buying him the precious seconds he needed.

Then he moved.

He disappeared into the trees. A moment later, shouting erupted from the eastern side. The

attackers turned toward the commotion.

Viktor had drawn their attention.

“Now!”

I moved. The warriors followed, fighting as we made our retreat. They fell back only enough to

keep pace with me, turning to strike at anyone who came too close.

Silver tore through the trees around us.

Viktor suddenly appeared ahead of us and pointed toward a narrow passage between the trees.

“Go right!”

We followed. Another silver projectile flew past my shoulder. I ducked instinctively, but Viktor

stepped in front of me.

The projectile struck his shoulder. He grunted.

“Viktor!”

“I’m fine.”

He ripped the silver device from his shoulder. Blood immediately began running down his arm.

My stomach twisted. “You’ve been hit.”

“Don’t worry about me, Alpha. I’m fine.”

Before I could argue, another attacker appeared.

Viktor partially shifted. His eyes flashed gold, and his claws extended as he slammed the attacker

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into the ground with enough force to c***k the earth beneath him. Then he grabbed my wrist.

“Run.”

We took off.

He led us through another narrow trail while two warriors stayed just behind us, guarding our

backs. The rest remained farther behind, fighting to keep the attackers from cutting off our path.

But the attackers kept coming.

“They’re closing in!” one of the warriors shouted.

“I know.” Viktor glanced over his shoulder before suddenly stopping beside a cave to our left. “Stay

here.”

I stared at him. “What? Why?”

“I’ll take the other path and draw them away.”

He turned toward the warriors. “Protect the Alpha.”

They immediately nodded.

Then Viktor looked back at me. “I will be back, Alpha.”

I wanted to stop him, but the determination in his eyes made me hesitate.

I nodded.

He turned and deliberately stepped into the open. Three attackers immediately spotted him.

Viktor ran. They chased after him.

My heart pounded as I watched him disappear down the wrong path, deliberately leading them

away from us.

He wasn’t fighting them. He was redirecting them.

Once their footsteps faded, Viktor returned from another angle.

“Come on.”

We moved again. The second time, he did it again. Then a third.

Each time, Viktor drew the pursuers away before circling back and leading us farther toward safety. With every diversion, he put himself in greater danger.

By the third time, blood had soaked through his sleeve.

“You’re seriously hurt.”

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“That’s not important right now, Aria.” His voice left no room for argument.

clenched my jaw and kept moving. We finally reached the secure zone. The moment we crossed

the boundary, the suppression field disappeared.

Lydia surged forward.

Power flooded through my veins so suddenly that my knees nearly buckled beneath me. I caught myself, breathing heavily as the familiar strength of my wolf rushed through my body.

We’re safe. Lydia’s voice was quiet, but I could feel the relief beneath it.

I looked around.

The warriors who had fought to hold the line filed in behind us, bloodied and exhausted but alive. Every one of them had thrown themselves between me and the attackers without a second

thought.

Then my eyes landed on Viktor. He was still standing. Blood dripped steadily from his arm.

I stepped toward him. “You took every hit meant for me.”

He looked at me as though it were the most obvious thing in the world.

“It is my duty to protect you, Alpha.”

Something tightened inside my chest.

For a moment, I couldn’t speak.

Lydia’s voice softened inside my mind. He didn’t hesitate. None of them did.

I looked at Viktor’s bloodied arm.

Then I looked at the warriors standing behind him, wounded because they had protected me.

“No,” I whispered. My throat tightened. “He didn’t.”

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Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 315

Aria’s POV

Claim

It had been several hours since the ambush, and I was finally able to breathe without feeling like death was waiting around the next corner. The danger had passed. At least, that was what everyone kept telling me.

I sat alone in the training room, staring at the floor. My fingers slowly curled into fists as I replayed the attack in my mind.

Something about that ambush had been different. My bloodline power had surged more strongly than before, racing through my veins and spreading from my core into my limbs.

But I had been unable to use it because of the suppression weapon.

It was strength we had never felt before.

I lifted my hand and focused. A faint current of energy shimmered beneath my skin. I watched it travel along my fingers before fading away. My breath caught.

I'd spent months training my body to withstand greater levels of power. I'd pushed myself through exhaustion, pain, and countless failures.

There had been days when I'd wondered whether all that training was doing anything at all. Now, I had my answer. My body was adapting. My bloodline was adapting. And Lydia was adapting with

We are becoming stronger than ever, she said proudly.

A small smile touched my lips. "We are."

The ambush had taught me that power was like a muscle. The more I forced it to endure, the more it learned to withstand. But it had also taught me something else, something far more disturbing.

Information about our movements might have been leaked to the attackers.

Lydia went silent.

I leaned back against the wall, my thoughts returning to the attack. The location. The timing. The route I'd taken. At first, I'd dismissed it as a coincidence, but when I started reviewing everything carefully, the pieces refused to remain separate.

Three days before the ambush, I'd changed my regular patrol routes. It had been a minor adjustment. Instead of using the eastern road, I'd decided to take the southern path.

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I'd made the decision myself. Only a handful of people knew about it.

And the attackers had been waiting for me along that exact route.

My stomach tightened. They hadn't simply attacked me. They'd anticipated me.

Someone gave them the information, Lydia growled.

"That's right."

I thought about confiding in someone, or perhaps setting up an interrogation to determine who

had leaked the information.

No, we can't do that, Lydia warned. We need to figure out who the culprit is first.

I stared at the floor. She was right. If there was a traitor inside the pack, confronting the wrong person would only alert the real culprit. So, for now, I kept my mouth shut.

The aftermath of the ambush changed things quickly. Viktor's reputation within the pack rose almost overnight. Before the attack, everyone respected him. Afterward, they looked at him

differently.

Claur

He had protected me when things had turned ugly. He had taken risks that could have cost him his life, and everyone who had been with us had witnessed it.

Members of the pack who heard the story began greeting him with greater respect. Some even sought his opinion during patrol meetings.

Viktor handled the attention without arrogance. He had earned their trust, and honestly, I was glad. The pack needed people like him. People who would stand their ground when everything went

wrong.

But the more I watched the pack, trying to figure out who had leaked the exact details of our border patrol, the more uncomfortable I became.

I sat at the dining table that evening, barely touching my food. Around me, conversations filled the room. Laughter mingled with the scrape of utensils against plates.

My werewolf senses made everything painfully clear. I could hear heartbeats beneath the voices and smell the different scents of every pack member nearby. Usually, that familiarity comforted

Tonight, it didn't. I slowly looked around the room. Who knew? Who had access to my patrol schedule? Who knew about the route change?

Who could have passed that information to the attackers?

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Clau

My gaze moved from one person to another, studying every face without allowing my suspicion to

show.

You're looking at everyone like they're an enemy, Lydia observed.

Because one of them might be.

She didn't argue. Instead, her attention sharpened.

Then we watch.

I lowered my eyes before anyone noticed. I couldn't let suspicion control me. But from that moment forward, I stopped assuming the danger was only outside the pack.

Maybe it wasn't. Maybe the enemy hadn't been hiding somewhere beyond our borders.

Maybe they'd been standing right beside me all along.

If that was true, I would find them before they had another chance to strike.

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 316

Aria's POV

Viktor was the first person to make me realize that training harder wasn't always the same as

training smarter. After the ambush, I'd expected him to tell me to increase the intensity of my

sessions.

Clair

Instead, he studied me. He watched the way my bloodline power moved through my body, how

Lydia responded when I pushed too far, and how quickly my control deteriorated when I tried to

force an output that my body wasn't ready to sustain.

One evening, after I'd nearly lost control during a power-release exercise, Viktor caught my wrist

before I could try again.

"Alpha, stop."

I glared at him. "I'm not finished."

"You are." He sighed. "If you continue, you'll burn through your reserves and spend tomorrow

recovering."

I pulled my hand free. "I need to get stronger."

"And you will. But strength without control is just another weakness."

His words irritated me because they sounded too much like something Damon would say. I folded

my arms. "So what do you suggest?"

Viktor looked toward the setting sun. "Change the time you train."

I followed his gaze. The last rays of sunlight stretched across the training grounds, bathing the

trees in gold. "Why should I do that?"

"Your power isn't behaving like ordinary wolf energy."

That was already clear. He crouched and picked up a piece of broken stone from the ground. The

surface still carried traces of the energy I'd released earlier. "It reacts to the altar's residual field."

My expression hardened. "The altar?"

Viktor nodded. He turned the stone between his fingers. "The field fluctuates at certain intervals."

He looked at me. "Mostly around dusk and just before dawn."

Lydia stirred immediately. Those times are usually the times we are strongest.

I nodded slowly. "So you think I should train then?"

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"Not just train. Release your power."

raised an eyebrow. "At full intensity?"

He shook his head. "No, at controlled intensity."

"That sounds less impressive."

A faint smile tugged at his mouth. "I wasn't trying to impress you, Alpha."

For some reason, that made me smile too. I quickly looked away. "Fine. We'll try it."

Clair

The next evening, I stood alone in the training field as the sun disappeared beyond the horizon. The air felt different. It was cooler and heavier.

I closed my eyes. I could feel strong energy flowing through me.

Viktor stood several feet away. "Don't force it."

I nodded.

"Focus on the release point."

I inhaled. My wolf stirred. Power gathered in my chest. For a moment, I felt the familiar pressure

building too quickly.

Normally, I would have fought against it. This time, I didn't. I let it move. Down my arms. Through my shoulders. Into my palms. Then I released it.

A pulse of energy exploded forward. The ground beneath my feet trembled. I staggered. But instead of the violent backlash I'd experienced before, the power settled almost immediately.

I stared at my hands.

Viktor's eyes widened slightly. "Do it again."

I turned toward him. "That was faster."

"Yes, it was." He pointed toward the center of the training field. "Focus on the target and go again."

I released another pulse. This time, I controlled the spread. The energy surged forward in a

concentrated wave, striking the target instead of scattering around me.

My breath caught. I'd never managed that before.

Lydia practically purred. Let's do it again.

I laughed under my breath. "You're enjoying this."

GW

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We're finally learning how to use what we have.

couldn't disagree. We trained until the last traces of daylight disappeared. And when I woke

before dawn the next morning, Viktor was already waiting.

He didn't need to explain. We repeated the exercise. The result was even better. My activation time shortened. My output became steadier. My control sharpened.

It wasn't just that I was becoming stronger. I was becoming precise. That difference mattered. Power without precision could destroy everything around me. Precision turned power into a weapon. I finally understood exactly what Viktor had been trying to teach me.

Claim

Our training soon expanded beyond power releases. Viktor started sparring with me. At first, I thought he was simply testing my physical abilities. I was wrong. He was teaching me exactly how

he fought.

“You lead with your right shoulder,” I told him after blocking a strike.

His mouth curved. “You are learning pretty well.”

He attacked again. I ducked beneath his arm and twisted, attempting to sweep his legs. He jumped over the movement. I barely had time to recover before his hand came toward my shoulder. I blocked it. The impact sent a sharp vibration through my arm.

Lydia growled. He’s very fast. Hit him.

I almost laughed. You’re getting aggressive.

He is challenging us.

That’s the point of sparring.

Then stop talking and bite him.

I bit back a smile. Viktor noticed. “What is it?”

I shook my head. “Nothing.”

I lunged, and he blocked. I attacked again. This time, I caught him across the ribs. He stumbled

backward. I froze.

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Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 317

Axia’s POV

Viktor looked down at the place I’d struck. Then he looked at me. “You have become better.”

I grinned. “Just better?”

He smiled. “Much better.”

I felt an unfamiliar thrill spread through me. I wanted to do it again. I wanted to see how far I could push myself. So I attacked, and he met me blow for blow.

Days passed, and our training became a routine. Dusk, sparring, power release, and recovery. Then,

before dawn, we did it all again.

Somewhere along the way, something changed. I began looking forward to training with Viktor. At first, I told myself it was because I was improving. That was true, but it wasn't the whole truth.

I liked the way he challenged me without trying to control me. I liked how he never treated me as fragile. I liked the understanding that had developed between us.

Sometimes, we didn't need words. A glance was enough. A shift of his stance told me what attack was coming. The slight tightening of my fingers told him I was about to release my power. We moved together naturally.

One evening, after another long sparring session, I lowered myself onto the grass, breathing heavily. Viktor sat beside me. For several seconds, neither of us spoke. The moon was rising

above the trees.

I looked at him. He was already looking at me. Our eyes met. Something strange tightened in my

chest.

Lydia became unusually quiet. Then she whispered, You like him.

My heart skipped. Don't.

You do.

I looked away quickly. "This is getting ridiculous."

Viktor frowned. "What is?"

"Nothing."

My throat tightened. I didn't know what else to say. At that moment, a realization hit me. I was beginning to notice Viktor in a way I hadn't before.

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The strength in his arms when we sparred. The steadiness of his voice. The way his eyes followed

me whenever I pushed myself too hard. The concern he tried to hide.

I swallowed. Lydia's voice came again. You are drawn to him.

I closed my eyes and didn't argue with her because she was right.

The intelligence came together in pieces, each one colder than the last. Joshua, Ryder, and Noah had been conducting a joint investigation into the attackers.

Joshua's report confirmed my earlier suspicions. According to him, the armor used by the attackers, the markings carved into the metal, and their coordinated movements all pointed in one direction. The Nightshade Clan. Their influence had reached our territory.

They are vampires, Lydia growled.

I clenched my jaw. Yes, ancient vampires.

I scrolled farther. The fighting style described in the report matched what we'd witnessed during

the ambush.

My stomach tightened. "So it really was them."

Ryder's investigation had taken the information further. He'd used commercial intelligence channels to search for unusual activity around the border regions, and the results had been

disturbing.

Nightshade activity had been recorded there repeatedly. Not openly, but enough to establish a

pattern.

Then Noah provided the piece that made everything fall into place. Silas had maintained a long-standing trading relationship with the Nightshade Clan while he was alive.

Resources, information, weapons, and movement through territories. The connection ran deeper than I had imagined. Silas hadn't been operating alone. He'd been backed by the Nightshade Clan, and now that he was dead, they weren't retreating. They were stepping forward.

I pushed away from the desk. "They're taking over where he left off."

Lydia's growl deepened. They aren't taking over. She paused. They're finally revealing themselves.

I felt the same realization settle heavily in my chest. Silas had been useful to them. He had been a shield and middleman, someone who could operate in the shadows while the Nightshade Clan remained hidden.

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Now he was gone, and there was no reason for them to hide behind him anymore.

My fingers curled around the edge of the desk. My heart hammered. The attackers had known exactly where I would be. They'd known my route. They'd known when to strike. That obviously meant they weren't simply sending soldiers across the border. They were watching us.

I had already established that one of us had tipped them off. They had eyes inside our territory or worse. They had already established a base nearby.

"An outpost," I whispered.

Lydia's ears seemed to flatten in my mind. Or an intelligence network.

Either possibility was bad. I immediately reached for my phone.

Damon answered before the second ring. "Aria?"

"We have a problem."

His voice changed instantly. “What happened?”

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Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 318

Axia’s POV

I stared at the window. “I know who backed the ambush.”

There was silence. Then his voice became sharper. “Who?”

“The Nightshade Clan.”

Claim

Another silence followed. I could practically imagine Rhein lifting his head inside Damon.
“Are you

certain?”

“Yes. Joshua’s investigation connected the attackers’ equipment markings and combat style to them. Ryder confirmed Nightshade activity around the border through commercial records. Noah found evidence that Silas maintained a long-term trading relationship with the clan.”

Damon exhaled slowly. “So Silas was working for them.”

“More accurately, he was working with them.” I moved toward the window. “And now that he’s gone, they’re moving themselves.”

Damon didn’t hesitate. “I’ll increase reconnaissance around Silvermoon territory.”

“Don’t just increase patrols. Change the patterns and don’t make it obvious.”

“I know.”

I closed my eyes briefly. “Tell everyone to be careful, Damon. No one should travel alone if they can avoid it. Increase border surveillance, but don’t let the patrols become predictable. I will deliver the warning to my pack members too.”

“Aria,” he said.

“What?”

“Be careful yourself.”

I almost smiled. “I will.”

Neither of us spoke for a moment. Then I heard something beneath his voice. It was raw, unmistakable concern. My chest tightened.

“I have to go.”

“Aria.”

I paused. “What?”

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“We’ll deal with this together.”

swallowed. “Let’s hope we get the chance.”

I ended the call before my voice could betray me.

The warning reached everyone in my pack. When my father heard it, he sent for me.

I found him sitting upright in a chair by the window.

He looked up the moment I stepped through the door.

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“Sit, my child,” he said. I did. He leaned forward, elbows on his knees, his voice low and deliberate.

“I heard the news. The vampires have begun to move. That ambush on you was not an isolated

strike. It was a test. A first cut.”

“I know.” My hands curled against my thighs.

His gaze

held mine. “Aria, if the other packs stay in their separate dens without unity, Nightshade will open a wider breach inside wolfkind. They will pick the territories apart one by one. By the time the Alphas realize the pattern, it will already be too late.”

The words landed like cold iron. I felt Lydia’s growl vibrate through my chest. He is right. Isolation

is death.

“I have to get the intelligence out,” I said. “All of it. I have to do that fast.”

Ronan nodded once. “Do it yourself. Use encrypted channels. No intermediaries who can dilute the warning or turn it into politics. Tell them the Nightshade Clan is active, that they used Silas as a blade, and that the next strike will not wait for consensus. Make the packs choose to either stand together or be hunted separately.”

I rose. The urgency was already burning under my skin. “I’ll send it before nightfall.”

Later that afternoon, Damon found me. I was standing outside the training grounds when I sensed him approaching. His scent reached me first.

Lydia stirred. Our mate.

Damon stopped a few feet away. For several seconds, he said nothing. Then he looked at me. “I owe you an apology.”

I folded my arms. “For what?”

“For what happened at the Council.” He stepped closer. “I shouldn’t have tried to convince you to accept those terms.”

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Unclaimed Prizes Inside

Tap to claim your bonus before it's gone

“was trying to make a decision for you.”

That made me look back at him. Damon's expression was serious. “I had no right.”

I didn't answer.

He took another step. “But there's something else I want to ask.”

My stomach tightened. “What is that?”

“Don't sever the mate bond.”

I stared at him. For a moment, I thought I'd misunderstood. “Why?”

“It's not self-interest.” His voice dropped, rough with memory.

“I know what it feels like when power starts to slip the leash. I lived it. The bond... it can anchor you when everything else fractures. If yours breaks loose the way mine once did, that link might be the only thing that keeps it from turning inward. From consuming you.”

Lydia's presence sharpened. He speaks truth. We have felt the edges of that chaos.

I thought of the surges, the nights the power had threatened to rip free without pattern or mercy. The bond had steadied me before.

I met his eyes. “All right. We leave it for now.”

Something eased in his shoulders. “Thank you.”

We stood there in the cooling air, the accord settling between us like a temporary truce.

The Nightshade threat still loomed, the packs still needed warning, and the bond remained between us like an invisible thread connecting two wolves who were still trying to figure out what they were to each other.

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Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 319

Aria's POV

I had spent the entire night compiling the intelligence on the Nightshade Clan. Every report, every border sighting, every piece of equipment recovered from the ambush, every record Ryder had obtained, and every detail Noah had uncovered about Silas's relationship with the vampires.

I organized everything into a single report and submitted it to the Werewolf Council before dawn. If they refused to believe me after seeing all of it, then they weren't interested in the truth. They

were interested in waiting until the truth became impossible to ignore.

I sat in the Council chamber while the members reviewed my report. The atmosphere was suffocating. Several councilors whispered among themselves. Others avoided looking at me

altogether.

Finally, the eldest councilor placed the report on the table. "We've reviewed the evidence." His expression remained unreadable. "The intelligence requires official verification."

I stared at him. "People were attacked."

"That does not establish the Nightshade Clan as the confirmed aggressor."

"Their equipment carried their markings."

"Allegedly."

I clenched my jaw. "Ryder confirmed their activity along the border."

"Commercial records are not sufficient."

"Noah confirmed Silas's trading relationship with them."

Another councilor leaned back. "Silas had dealings with many factions."

I almost laughed. “You can’t be serious.”

“We are being cautious, Alpha Aria.”

“No. You’re being complacent. We need a joint defensive front. If we wait, they will keep cutting us apart.”

The discussion that followed was slow poison.

The eldest councilor steepled his fingers. “As I said earlier, the intelligence remains unofficially verified. We cannot commit resources on the word of a single pack.”

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Another councilor chimed in. “Also, the Grayson territory is newly stabilized. It lacks the depth to

lead any joint operation.”

I kept my tone level even as Lydia’s growl rolled under my ribs. They smell the truth and still look

away.

I kept my expression neutral. I looked around the chamber. “Grayson territory doesn’t lack depth for a joint operation, and I will prove that now.”

I began listing everything. Our defensive perimeter, the reinforced borders, the patrol system, the newly established communication network, the combat records from the recent attacks, and the

training improvements.

The number of warriors available for deployment. The successful defenses against previous threats. One by one, I laid everything before them.

“We are prepared to contribute troops, intelligence, and resources to a joint defensive operation.” I looked directly at the councilors. “I’m not asking you to follow me blindly. I’m asking you to protect your territories before the enemy reaches them.”

There was silence. Then the councilor at the center folded his hands. “We’ll postpone the vote on that until next season, after the intelligence has been officially verified.”

My fingers tightened around the edge of the table. "Postpone?" I stared at him. "How many more attacks do you need?"

Nobody answered.

Lydia's claws scraped against the inside of my mind. They are afraid of you.

I looked around the chamber.

The realization settled coldly in my chest. This wasn't about evidence. It never had been. They didn't trust me because I was a female Alpha. And they certainly didn't want to give me enough

authority to prove them wrong.

I stood. "When the vampires come through your borders, remember that you chose to wait."

I walked out before they could answer.

I went to the Council headquarters. I barely made it ten steps into the corridor before several councilors stepped into my path. I stopped.

One of them smiled. It wasn't friendly. "Ms. Aria."

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"Councilor."

He glanced at the others, then returned his gaze to me. "You seem very comfortable walking around here."

"I was under the impression this was Council headquarters, not your private residence."

A few people nearby snickered,

The man's jaw tightened. "You may find this amusing, but your position is anything but secure."

My expression hardened. "What position?"

"Your position as Alpha."

The corridor became silent.

Card

I glanced at the other councilors standing behind him. None of them looked particularly friendly.

“I was unaware the Council had the authority to decide whether I was Alpha.”

“We have the authority to recognize an Alpha,” another councilor said coldly. “And we have the authority to determine whether that Alpha is capable of maintaining order.”

I almost laughed.

Another spoke. “That’s right. You are a young woman with an unstable territory, limited political support, and enemies surrounding your borders. Your claim to the Grayson territory is

questionable.”

“My claim?”

I stepped closer.

“My father is Ronan Grayson. The territory belongs to my family. I am his daughter and the rightful Alpha of our newly formed pack.”

“You are also a woman.”

The words came from a younger councilor standing slightly behind the others. My eyes moved to

1 him.

He gave me a smug smile. “There are traditions for a reason.”

“Traditions?” I repeated.

“An Alpha needs strength, authority, and a stable bloodline. You have power, yes, but power alone

does not guarantee stability.”

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Lydia growled inside my mind. Break his confidence.

Nalmost smiled. I'm considering it.

The younger councilor took another step toward me. "There is another solution."

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Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 320

Arja's POV

I raised an eyebrow. "I'm listening."

"You could bond with one of the stronger Alpha bloodlines."

My expression slowly changed.

He continued, seemingly encouraged by my silence. "A mating bond with a respected Alpha would

immediately strengthen your position. The Council would have no reason to question your leadership, and your territory would have the protection it needs."

Another councilor nodded. "It would also prevent instability within the Grayson territory."

I stared at them. They were at it again. "You are suggesting that I take a mate so you will recognize

me as Alpha?"

"We are suggesting that you make a practical decision."

"Practical?" The word left my mouth quietly.

The younger councilor smiled. "I am an Alpha myself. My pack is strong. If you accepted me, your position would be secure."

I looked at him for several seconds. Then I laughed. It wasn't loud or hysterical. It was just enough

to make his smile disappear.

"You think I'm going to bond with you so you can make my position legitimate?"

His face reddened. "I am offering you protection."

"I don't need it."

"You may change your mind when your territory begins losing support."

Another councilor stepped forward.

"You should also understand that if the Council determines the Grayson territory cannot remain

stable under your rule, your land rights can be reassessed."

My amusement disappeared. There it was, the threat. They wanted my territory. They wanted my power, and apparently, some of them thought they could have both by forcing me into a political

bond.

Lydia's growl became louder. They are trying to corner us. Let me out.

DIG GW

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I took a slow breath. "Let me make something clear."

The councilors watched me.

"I will not take a mate because you demand it. I will not surrender my territory because you dislike my gender. And I certainly will not allow any of you to decide whether I am worthy of being Alpha."

The younger councilor scoffed. "You are making a mistake."

"No." I stepped closer. "You are."

His expression changed. “What did you say?”

“You heard me.”

The air around me shifted. I didn’t deliberately summon my power. I didn’t need to. It responded to my emotions before I could stop it.

A pulse of Alpha power rolled through the corridor.

The councilors froze.

Several warriors immediately lowered their heads.

The younger councilor’s knees buckled. He caught himself against the wall, his face draining of

color.

I stared at him. “Is this the unstable Alpha you were talking about?”

Nobody answered. I released another wave.

This time, every councilor in front of me was forced down. Some dropped to one knee, others

struggled to remain standing.

The younger councilor collapsed completely. Gasps filled the corridor.

I could feel Lydia’s satisfaction. They wanted to see our strength. Now they have.

I held their gazes. “You questioned my ability to lead. You questioned my right to rule. You threatened my territory.”

I slowly looked around the corridor.

“Remember this moment the next time you decide to underestimate me.”

One of the senior councilors struggled to lift his head. “You cannot intimidate the Council.”

“I’m not intimidating you.”

I lowered my power. The councilors sagged with relief.

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Clair

“I’m only reminding you.”

The corridor remained silent. Then the younger councilor suddenly slammed his fist against the floor.

“You will regret humiliating me!”

I turned toward him. His eyes were burning with fury.

“You think this ends here?” He pushed himself upright. “It doesn’t.”

He looked toward the men stationed farther down the corridor.

“Guards!”

They immediately reacted. Several armed men rushed toward us.

The young councilor pointed at me. “Seize her!”

Before I could react, a blur crossed my vision. It was Viktor.

He stepped between me and the guards.

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Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 321

Aria’s POV

Clar

The first guard swung. Viktor caught his wrist. There was a sharp c***k. The guard dropped with a

cry.

Another charged from the side. Viktor pivoted, drove his elbow into the man's chest, and sent him crashing into the wall.

Two more attacked together. He didn't even hesitate. He ducked beneath one strike, swept the

first guard's legs, and drove his shoulder into the second. Both men hit the floor.

I stared. Viktor moved like he had anticipated every attack before it happened.

One guard managed to get behind him. I started forward. Viktor glanced over his shoulder. "I've

got it."

The guard swung. Viktor caught the punch. Then he twisted. The man went down hard.

Within seconds, the entire guard detail was on the floor. Silence descended over the corridor.

Viktor stood among them, barely breathing heavily.

The young councilor stared at him. "What exactly are you?"

Viktor looked at him coldly. "Someone whose Alpha you shouldn't have sent your guards to attack."

Lydia gave an approving growl. I like him.

I almost smiled. You liked him before.

I like him even more now.

The young councilor's face turned red. "You think this ends here?"

Viktor didn't answer.

The young councilor looked at me. "I'll gather my pack." His voice shook with fury. "And when I do,

I'll tear your newly established territory apart."

I stepped forward. "You can try."

“You have no idea how unstable your pack is.”

“Then come find out.”

His eyes narrowed. “I’ll destroy the Grayson Pack.” He turned and stormed away.

The crowd slowly began dispersing.

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Viktor watched him leave. Then he looked at me. “Are you afraid?”

raised an eyebrow. “Of him?”

He shook his head. “Of what comes next.”

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I looked toward the corridor where the councilor had disappeared. “I’ve known for a long time that someone would eventually come after me.”

“And you’re not worried?”

“I am.” Viktor’s expression softened. “But fear doesn’t mean I’m unprepared.”

I looked toward the direction of Grayson territory. “My pack isn’t the same pack it was before.”

He nodded. “It certainly isn’t.”

“People keep assuming that because we are new, we are weak, but that is not true.”

Viktor was silent.

I smiled faintly. “That assumption will hurt them more than it hurts us.”

You are confident. Lydia’s voice carried a hint of amusement.

Shouldn’t I be?

You are hiding something.

I frowned. What?

Your instincts are uneasy.

She was right. Despite everything I had said, something about the confrontation bothered me.

Not the councilor, not his threat, something else. I just couldn't explain it. It was the same feeling

I'd had before the ambush.

Like something was moving beneath the surface. Something I couldn't see. I pushed the thought aside.

"We'll be ready for whatever comes next," I told Viktor.

He nodded.

"Then let's make sure everyone else is ready too."

The next morning, the news reached us before breakfast. I was in the main hall when one of the

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warriors rushed through the doors, his face pale.

"Alpha."

I immediately stood, my chest already tightening at the look on his face.

"What happened?"

He struggled to catch his breath before answering. "The councilor's pack."

My stomach tightened at the words. "What about them?" I pressed.

"They were attacked."

The room went silent, every head turning toward him.

"By whom?" I demanded.

The warrior swallowed hard. "Vampires."

A chill ran through me, and beside me, Lydia went completely still.

Vampires.

I stared at the warrior, willing him to be wrong.

“How bad was it?” I asked.

“Very bad.” His voice shook as he forced the words out. “There were heavy casualties. Several

warriors are dead. Dozens are injured.”

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Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 322

Aja's POV

The attack on the councilor's pack had sent shockwaves through every territory. Fear had spread

through wolfkind faster than any rumor.

Councilors and packs that had once dismissed the vampire attack on my border as untrue were suddenly reinforcing their borders. Patrols doubled. Councilors demanded protection.

Alphas who had spent years arguing over territory were now asking the same question.

Who would be next?

I stood at the Werewolf Council and looked at the gathered Alphas and councilors. Their uneasiness was almost tangible. I could smell it in the room.

Their scents were laced with fear, suspicion, anger, and beneath it all, uncertainty.

I rested both hands against the table. "The vampires have now attacked us twice."

The chamber fell silent.

"We need a coordinated defense system."

One of the older councilors leaned back in his chair. "And you believe you're qualified to design

one?"

I met his stare. "I know I'm qualified."

His lips tightened. "There are traditions for a reason."

"There are also graves created by outdated traditions," I replied.

A few wolves shifted uncomfortably.

Lydia stirred inside me, her claws scraping lightly against my consciousness.

Do not back down.

I wasn't planning to. I took a slow breath.

"I am proposing that the territories establish shared patrol routes, emergency communication channels, rapid-response units, and designated safe zones for civilians. Every participating pack will contribute warriors. Every Alpha will retain authority over their own territory, but in the event of an attack, our forces will respond together."

I tapped the map spread across the table. "This isn't about taking power from anyone. It's about

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making sure we stop fighting separately when our enemies are attacking collectively."

Several councilors exchanged glances. Then one of them scoffed.

"And we are supposed to take orders from a female Alpha?"

My jaw tightened. There it was again. The same excuse. Female. As if the strength of an Alpha could be measured by gender instead of the ability to protect a pack.

“I’m not asking you to take orders from me,” I said calmly. “I’m asking you to use a system that might save your people.”

“You’re still an unrecognized Alpha.”

“And yet you are sitting here discussing my plan.”

His expression darkened. Before he could answer, another voice cut through the chamber.

“I support her.”

Clare

Every head turned. Damon stood slowly. My eyes found his. Rhein’s presence brushed against my mind through the bond of our connection, strong and unwavering.

I felt warmth spread through my chest.

Damon looked around the room. “Aria’s plan is practical. It strengthens every territory without

taking authority away from individual Alphas. Silvermoon will participate.”

The chamber erupted into murmurs. One councilor frowned. “Alpha Damon, you should consider...”

“I have considered it.” His voice carried the weight of an Alpha command. “I support Aria.”

Ryder stood next. “So do I.”

He folded his arms across his chest. “If the council has a better defense strategy, let’s hear it.

Otherwise, we’re wasting time arguing about whether the person who designed the plan is a

woman.”

Several wolves lowered their eyes.

Then Noah rose.

“I support the plan as well.”

My gaze shifted toward him. Noah's expression was calm, but there was something sharp beneath

"We have already seen what happens when territories fail to cooperate. We cannot afford another attack while we are still arguing about tradition."

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The room gradually quieted.

One councilor sighed. "I will agree to a trial."

Another followed. "So will I."

Then another. By the time the discussion ended, six territories had agreed to test my deployment plan. I released a breath I hadn't realized I'd been holding.

You did it, Lydia said.

We did.

Her satisfaction warmed me.

The meeting finally broke apart. Alphas and councilors began filing out, discussing patrol routes

and the proposed response units.

I remained behind for a moment, staring at the map. Six territories. It was far from enough to protect every pack, but it proved the plan could move forward.

I turned toward Damon, Ryder, and Noah. "I wanted to thank you."

Damon gave me a small smile. "You don't have to do that."

"I do."

Ryder chuckled. "She'll probably argue with you for the next ten minutes if you tell her otherwise."

“Well, you are not wrong about that,” I admitted.

Noah smiled faintly. The moment felt almost normal.

Then I noticed someone standing farther down the corridor.

It was Viktor. He wasn’t smiling.

I frowned. “I’ll catch up with you guys later.”

Damon’s eyes softened. He studied me for a moment before nodding. “Alright.”

The three of them walked away.

I turned toward Viktor. “What is it?”

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Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 323

Aria’s POV

Viktor glanced around before stepping closer. “You shouldn’t be thanking them.”

My brows pulled together. “What?”

“Alpha Damon, Ryder, and Noah.” His voice dropped. “They aren’t helping you.”

I stared at him. “Then what are they doing?”

“They are marginalizing you.”

The word made my stomach tighten.

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Viktor continued before I could respond. “Think about what happened in there. You presented the plan. You did the work. Yet the moment the room became difficult, Damon stepped in front of you.

“He supported me.”

“Exactly.” His eyes held mine. “He stood in front of you.”

I frowned. “That’s what support looks like.”

“Is it?” His question lingered. Viktor lowered his voice. “Every time they speak for you, every time they step in to defend your position, what do the others see?”

I didn’t answer.

“They see a woman who needs powerful Alphas to protect her. You may not see it, Alpha, but the

council does.”

Lydia growled softly inside me. He’s twisting things.

I swallowed.

Viktor continued. “Eventually, they’ll stop seeing you as the leader of this movement. They’ll see

Damon, Ryder, and Noah as the ones actually carrying it.”

I looked toward the chamber where the others had disappeared. For a brief moment, doubt crept into my mind. Had I overlooked something?

Viktor stepped closer. “They will take your victories and make them theirs.”

My fingers curled into fists. “They wouldn’t.”

“Wouldn’t they?” His voice was quiet, almost sympathetic. “Think about it.”

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I stared at him. Viktor’s expression softened. “I’m only telling you because someone needs to.”

Lydia’s growl deepened. Do not believe him.

Viktor’s words stayed with me for several seconds. It was not because I believed him, but because

I couldn't understand why he had said them.

I slowly turned to face him. "Don't ever question my allies like that again."

His expression changed. I stepped closer, keeping my voice low enough that only he could hear.

"You don't know what Damon, Ryder, or Noah are thinking. So don't stand here and feed me

malicious guesses as if they're facts."

Viktor opened his mouth, but I raised a hand.

"No. Let me finish."

He fell silent.

"Damon supports me because that's who he is. Ryder has his own way of showing loyalty, and Noah..." I paused briefly. "Noah has helped me more times than I can count. They don't need to replace me to stand beside me."

Viktor looked away. "I was only trying to protect you."

"Then protect me from actual enemies." My voice hardened. "Don't create enemies out of people who have proven themselves to me."

A tense silence settled between us.

Lydia remained alert beneath my skin, her ears seemingly pricked as she watched Viktor through

my eyes.

You were right to confront him about them. Those three are our true allies.

I kept my gaze on Viktor. "Do you understand?"

He finally nodded. "Yes, Alpha."

"I don't want to have this conversation again."

"You won't." His shoulders lowered. "I'm sorry."

I studied him for a moment. There was no argument in his voice this time.

“All right.”

He nodded again before walking away. I watched him disappear down the corridor. Something

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about the conversation still bothered me, but I refused to let suspicion become another weapon

against the people I trusted.

I had enough enemies already.

The joint-defense plan entered execution three days later, and I was everywhere.

One moment I was standing in the northern territory, studying patrol routes with an Alpha. The

next, I was crossing a forest boundary with a group of warriors, checking whether the new

communication system worked properly.

I didn't simply send instructions from a desk. I went there myself. If an Alpha wanted to question

my strategy, I wanted to be there to answer him. If a warrior had concerns, I wanted to hear them

Also, if a territory was afraid of trusting the Grayson Pack, I wanted them to see with their own eyes that we weren't asking them to surrender their independence. We were asking them to

survive.

During a patrol of an older Alpha's territory, he watched me leap across a fallen tree before shaking his head. “You really intend to inspect every border yourself?”

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Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 324

Chapter 324

Aria's POV

I smiled. "Yes, I do."

"You know, you could order someone else to do it."

"I could." I looked toward the forest ahead. "But then I'd never know whether the reports I'm

receiving are accurate."

He laughed. "You're stubborn."

"I've been called worse."

Lydia's amusement brushed against my mind. He's starting to like us already.

Us?

Of course. I'm the charming one.

I almost laughed. You are definitely not the charming one, Lydia.

Liar.

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The patrol continued. Day after day, territory after territory, and slowly, something changed. The six territories that had initially agreed to the plan began speaking for it. Then another territory joined.

Then another.

By the end of the second week, six had become eight. A few days later, it became nine. Nine territories, nine Alphas willing to stand behind the joint-defense system.

The Grayson Pack's name began appearing in conversations where it once would have been dismissed. It was not appearing as a weak pack or a territory that needed protection, but as a

pack that had helped create something useful.

That mattered to me.

But there was something else that mattered even more... Damon.

Our mate bond had changed. It wasn't sudden. It was gradual. Every time we were near each other, the connection seemed to pull tighter.

His scent became more intoxicating. His presence more comforting. Sometimes I could feel Rhein stirring before Damon even entered the room.

One evening, Damon and I returned from a patrol just before sunset. We walked side by side

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toward the pack's temporary command post.

Damon glanced at me. "You're exhausted."

I shook my head. "I'm fine."

He chuckled. "You're terrible at admitting when you're tired."

"I have responsibilities."

"So do I, Aria, yet I don't burn myself out the way you do."

I looked at him. His expression was teasing, but there was warmth behind it.

"You're enjoying this."

"You mean watching you pretend you don't need rest?"

I let out an exaggerated sigh and rolled my eyes.

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He laughed. I couldn't stop myself from smiling too. The bond between us hummed. It was very

much alive.

We slowed when we reached the edge of the clearing. Neither of us spoke. The silence wasn't uncomfortable. It just felt different... charged.

Damon turned toward me. "Aria."

Something in his voice made my heart skip. "What?"

He took a step closer. My breath caught. His scent surrounded me.

Lydia immediately became restless. Mate.

I know.

Damon's eyes remained fixed on mine. "I've been wanting to ask you something."

"What is it?"

His gaze dropped slowly to my lips before returning to my eyes. The brief movement sent a shiver through me, and my pulse immediately betrayed me.

Lydia stirred inside me. He wants you.

I swallowed. Be quiet.

You want him too.

I ignored her.

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"Do you ever wonder what would happen if we stopped fighting this?" Damon asked.

My heart gave a hard thump. "What are we fighting?"

"The bond."

I didn't answer because I knew exactly what he meant.

The mate bond had always been there, but lately, it had become almost impossible to ignore.

Rhein was constantly yearning for Lydia, and Lydia was no better.

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Whenever Damon and I were close, the invisible thread between us seemed to tighten, pulling us

toward each other.

Damon took another step toward me.

The distance between us disappeared until I could feel the warmth radiating from his body.

“I don’t want to pressure you,” he murmured, his voice lower now. “But I keep finding myself unable

to resist you these days.”

His eyes searched mine.

“I want you, Aria.”

The words hit me harder than I expected.

Heat crept up my neck. I should have stepped back. Instead, I remained exactly where I was.

I looked into his eyes and saw something I rarely got to see... the man beneath the Alpha of the Silvermoon Pack. The man who had become an important part of my life.

My hand moved almost unconsciously. His fingers brushed mine. The contact was barely anything, yet warmth rushed through my entire body.

Lydia practically purred. Finally.

I almost laughed.

Damon’s lips curved. “What?”

I shook my head, trying to hide my smile. “Nothing.”

“You know I’m not buying that.” His thumb lightly grazed the side of my hand. “You definitely

thought something.”

“Maybe.”

“Care to tell me?”

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I lifted my chin. “No.”

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His smile deepened. Then he leaned closer. My breath caught. I could feel his breath against my

skin now, warm and tantalizingly close. His gaze dropped to my lips again, lingering this time.

Lydia practically melted inside me.

Let him kiss you.

My heart raced. For one suspended moment, neither of us moved. My lips parted without permission; my lungs forgot how to work. I could feel the heat of his mouth, the promise of it, the way the bond pulled taut and hummed under my skin like a live wire.

Then a voice cut through the tension like a blade.

“Alpha Aria!”

We sprang apart. I turned sharply. Viktor was hurrying toward us. He stopped a few feet away, looking between Damon and me. For one brief second, something unreadable crossed his face.

Then he cleared his throat.

“Sorry to interrupt.”

Damon’s jaw tightened. “What is it?”

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Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 325

Aria’s POV

“There’s a problem with the supply inventory,” Viktor replied.

I stared at him. “Now?”

He nodded. “It’s urgent.”

Damon glanced at me. The warmth from moments ago disappeared beneath the sudden interruption.

I sighed. “Fine, I will join you in a few minutes.”

Viktor nodded and started moving away.

I returned my gaze to Damon.

His jaw tightened. “That was deliberate.”

I turned toward him. “What was?”

“The interruption from Viktor.”

I frowned. “He said there was a problem with the supplies.”

“And you believed him?” Damon’s voice was cold.

I crossed my arms. “I didn’t have a reason not to.”

He stepped closer. “Aria, the supply issue could have waited.”

I glanced in the direction Viktor had gone. “How do you know that?”

“I just have a feeling it wasn’t something urgent.” Damon’s eyes darkened. “Viktor knew exactly

what he was doing.”

I remembered the way Viktor had appeared just as Damon and I were getting closer. My stomach

, tightened.

“You think he interrupted us intentionally?”

“I know he did.” His voice carried the authority of an Alpha.

Rhein's growl echoed faintly through the mate bond. He is a threat.

Lydia immediately answered. I don't trust him either.

I looked at Damon. "Why would he do that?"

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Damon's expression hardened. "Because he doesn't want me near you."

My eyebrows lifted. "That's quite an assumption."

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"It's not an assumption." He took another step toward me. "I've watched him around you. The way

he looks at you isn't the way a Beta looks at his Alpha."

My heart skipped. I looked away. "Maybe you're reading too much into it."

Damon gave a humorless laugh. "Am I?" He lowered his voice. "This is not the first time he has conveniently interrupted us when we're alone."

I didn't answer, because when Damon put it that way, the pattern was difficult to ignore.

Lydia shifted uneasily. He might be right about that. Viktor might be developing feelings for us.

I frowned as I thought about it.

Over the following days, I started paying closer attention to Viktor. At first, I told myself I was imagining things. Maybe Damon had made me suspicious. Maybe I was simply seeing ordinary behavior differently because of what he had said.

But then the small things began adding up. Viktor started appearing wherever I was. If I was in the training grounds, he would find a reason to be there.

If I was reviewing patrol reports, he would suddenly have something to discuss. If I left the command room, he would often be waiting outside.

Whenever he saw any other male around me, especially men of high standing, he would suddenly have something urgent to talk about in private.

One afternoon, I was leaving the training grounds when Viktor caught up with me.

“You’re going alone?”

I glanced over my shoulder. “Yes.”

“I’ll come with you,” he said.

“There’s no need for you to do that.”

“I said I’ll come.”

I stopped walking. The force in his voice made me turn completely.

“Viktor.”

He stopped too. “What?”

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“You’re starting to make me uncomfortable.”

His expression changed. “Why is that?”

“Because you’re behaving as though you have the right to decide who I spend time with.”

“I only want to protect you.”

“I already have warriors assigned to my protection.”

“I don’t trust that they will protect you as well as I can.”

“That’s completely my decision, not yours.” The words came out sharper than I intended.

Viktor stared at me. For a moment, neither of us moved. Then his expression softened.

“I just don’t want anything to happen to you.”

I sighed. “I understand that.”

Did I, though? I understood loyalty. I understood duty. I understood what it meant for a Beta to protect his Alpha. This... this was different.

There was something beneath his words, something personal. Slowly, an uncomfortable thought

entered my mind.

He has feelings for me.

Lydia was quiet for a moment. Then she murmured, I think you're right.

My chest tightened. I looked at Viktor again. If he truly loved me, shouldn't I feel something? A flutter, warmth, excitement... anything?

Instead, I felt confused and uneasy. There was no spark in my chest, no pull or longing, nothing like the overwhelming certainty I felt whenever Damon stood close enough for the mate bond to

awaken.

Viktor's feelings, whatever they were, didn't make my heart race. They made me want to step

back.

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Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 326

Aria's POV

The Grayson territory had not celebrated like this in a long time. Music filled the courtyard, warriors stood around open fires, and the scent of roasted meat drifted through the evening air.

For once, no one was talking about rogue attacks, council disputes, or territory defenses.

We were celebrating. The first section of our joint-defense line had been successfully completed.

I stood near the edge of the courtyard, watching my pack members enjoy themselves. Nine territories had joined the alliance. The thought filled me with satisfaction.

Lydia seemed pleased too. Look at them. They're very happy.

I smiled faintly. They deserve to be.

Her warmth brushed against my consciousness.

They trust us.

The word settled somewhere deep inside me.

Trust.

My pack had been through too much. We had fought, lost, rebuilt, and survived things that should have broken us. Seeing them laughing freely now reminded me why I kept fighting.

My gaze drifted across the courtyard and landed on Damon. He was speaking with several warriors, his dark hair catching the firelight. As if sensing my stare, he looked up. Our eyes met. His

mouth curved into a smile.

The bond between us stirred immediately. Warmth spread through my chest.

Damon excused himself from the warriors and walked toward me.

Our mate is coming our way, Lydia purred.

I shook my head slightly. Are you that excited?

Absolutely, I am.

I fought back a smile as Damon stopped in front of me. "You've been avoiding me all night."

I raised an eyebrow. "That's not true. I've been busy."

His lips twitched. "Busy enough to forget about me?"

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"Don't flatter yourself."

He chuckled, his gaze lingering on my face. “Well, how are you feeling?”

“Good, actually.”

His expression changed almost immediately. His gaze swept over me. “You look tired.”

I sighed. “Why does everyone keep saying that?”

“Because you’re terrible at resting.”

I laughed softly. “You sound like Viktor.”

Damon’s smile disappeared from his face. “Don’t compare me to him.”

I noticed the tension in his jaw. “You still don’t trust him.”

“No, I don’t.” His answer was immediate.

I sighed. “You don’t have to like him, but you need to trust me to handle him.”

His eyes softened. “I do. That’s the only reason I haven’t taken matters into my own hands.”

Before I could respond, music grew louder behind us. I glanced toward the gathering. “Come on.”

Damon raised an eyebrow. “Where?”

“You’re here to celebrate, aren’t you?”

“I thought I was here to spend time with you.”

I looked at him. He smiled. Heat crept into my cheeks.

You’re blushing, Aria, Lydia said smugly.

I ignored her and started walking. Damon followed.

For the next few minutes, we moved through the celebration together. I spoke with warriors, laughed at ridiculous stories, and even allowed one of the older pack members to drag me into a

dance.

Damon stayed close. For a moment, everything felt normal.

Then I felt it... A strange pressure beneath my skin. I froze. My smile disappeared. Something was

wrong.

Lydia immediately lifted her head. Aria.

I feel it.

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The power inside me shifted. It was wild and unstable. It pulsed through my veins like something

waking from a deep sleep.

My breath caught. I pressed a hand against my chest.

“Aria?” Damon’s voice sounded distant.

I tried to answer. “I...”

The power surged. A wave of energy burst out of me. The air around us seemed to tremble. The flames of the nearby fires bent violently, and several of my warriors stumbled backward. Gasps and startled shouts erupted throughout the courtyard.

I immediately tried to pull the power back. Lydia!

I’m trying!

The energy continued spreading. Then I heard a scream.

“Mom!”

My blood ran cold. I turned. Elona was standing only a few feet away. The wave hit her. Her small body was thrown backward.

“Elona!”

I lunged toward her. She landed on the grass. She wasn't bleeding, she wasn't injured, but she stared at me with wide, terrified eyes, and then she began to cry. The sound tore straight through

The power inside me snapped back instantly. Silence crashed over the courtyard. I stood frozen. My hands trembled.

I hurt her.

Lydia's voice was frantic. She isn't hurt.

I almost hurt her.

I could barely breathe. She was my daughter, my little girl, and my power had just knocked her to the ground.

"Elona..."

I took a step toward her. She flinched. That hurt more than anything. I stopped.

Damon moved immediately. He reached Elona.

"It's okay," he murmured, lifting her into his arms.

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She buried her face against his chest, sobbing. I stared at them. My daughter was afraid of me,

and it was because of me.

Damon looked at me. There was no accusation in his eyes, only concern.

"Aria."

I couldn't answer.

He held Elona closer. "I'm taking her inside."

I nodded weakly. "Okay."

Damon turned and carried Elona away. I remained where I was.

I looked down at my trembling hands. My bloodline power had always been difficult to control, but

never like this.

I closed my eyes. Lydia was silent now. She had no reassurance to offer.

I swallowed hard. What is happening to us?

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Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 327

Aria's POV

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The party had ended. I was walking the corridor toward my room when the power surged again

without warning. It was hot, wild, and completely out of control.

Silver light flickered under my skin. The air around me warped. A crystal vase on a side table

shattered without being touched.

Aria! Lydia's voice cut through the rising panic. Breathe... the bloodline power is leaking again.

"I know," I gritted out, bracing a hand against the wall. The concrete scorched under my palm. "I

can't stop it."

Damon was already at my side. He had stayed close ever since the incident with Elona earlier,

never more than a few steps away.

His eyes glowed faintly gold the moment the surge hit. Rhein's presence pressed against the mate bond like a heavy hand on my shoulder.

"Aria." His voice was low and controlled, but I felt the spike of alarm through the bond. "Look at me."

I tried, but another pulse of power ripped outward. The lights above us flickered and died.

Somewhere down the corridor, a window cracked. Several pack members rushed forward with

startled growls.

"Everyone, stay clear!" Damon's Alpha command rang out. They obeyed instantly.

I doubled over as another wave tore through my veins. "Damon... stay away."

No. His answer slammed through the bond, immediate and unyielding. You don't get to decide that

for me.

He closed the distance in two strides and gripped my wrists, forcing my hands against his chest. The mate bond flared. It was warm, insistent, and demanding. His power wrapped around mine

like a living shield.

"Focus on me," he ordered. "Not the power, me."

Let him in, Lydia urged, restless and worried. He's the only thing steady enough right now.

I opened the bond wider. Damon's Alpha strength poured through, Rhein's colder control, the unbreakable certainty of a fated mate.

O

The wild silver energy inside me bucked, then slowly, grudgingly, began to settle under the

pressure.

But it wasn't enough. The power still pushed back, searching for any c***k.

Damon's jaw tightened. He knew it too. Without another word, he swept me up into his arms. My body jolted against his chest as another small pulse sparked across my skin.

"I've got you," he said roughly, already striding toward my room. "Hold on."

The door to my chambers slammed shut behind us. The second we were alone, the bond surged harder, demanding physical contact, proximity, and more.

Damon set me on my feet only long enough to pull his shirt over his head.

"Take your clothes off," he said, his voice rough with both man and wolf. "The bond needs everything right now."

I didn't argue. My fingers shook as I stripped, power still sparking faintly across my skin. The moment our skin came together and our mouths collided, the mate bond roared to life.

Damon pushed me back onto the bed, covering me with his body, and drove into me in one deep

thrust.

The connection locked.

Every pulse of my uncontrolled power slammed into the bond and was swallowed by it. Damon's weight, his scent, the hard rhythm of his hips... all of it became an anchor.

I clung to him, my nails digging into his shoulders, while Lydia paced inside my mind.

Yes. Take what he offers. Steady yourself.

"I've got you," Damon growled against my throat. "I've got you, Aria. Let it go."

I did. Wave after wave of unstable energy poured out of me and into the bond, where Rhein's presence met it head-on and crushed it into something manageable.

Pleasure and power tangled until I couldn't tell them apart. When the c****x finally tore through me, the last violent surge of my bloodline power shattered against Damon's control and went quiet.

For a long moment, the only sound was our ragged breathing.

Damon stayed buried inside me, his forehead pressed to mine, both of us slick with sweat. The room smelled of s*x, wolf, and the sharp ozone edge of spent power.

The mate bond still hummed, warm and heavy, like a living chain between us.

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I swallowed. “It’s... quieter.”

“For now.” His voice was grim. He eased out of me carefully, then pulled me against his chest.

“That was a stopgap, Aria. Your power is still unstable. The bond can only suppress it for so long before it starts looking for another way out.”

He’s right, Lydia murmured, unease threading through her tone. Whatever woke inside you at that party isn’t finished. I can still feel it, waiting.

I closed my eyes, listening to Damon’s heartbeat, feeling the steady thrum of the bond that had just saved me and knowing it wasn’t a permanent solution.

Tomorrow, the power might push again, and the mate bond might not be enough.

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Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 328

ja’s POV

It was morning, and I was sitting in the healer’s chamber while she examined me for the third time. The room smelled of herbs and wolfbane, and faint golden energy moved across my skin as the

healer ran her hands over my arms.

She frowned slightly. “Your bloodline power is unusually active.”

“Yeah.” I glanced down at my hands. “I’ve noticed.”

She continued the examination, checking my pulse, my aura, and the flow of my wolf’s energy.

Lydia remained unusually quiet.

Do you feel anything?

No.

That bothered me. Normally, Lydia could sense even the slightest disturbance in my body.

The healer finally stepped back. "I can't find anything."

I looked at her. "Nothing?"

She shook her head. "No poison, no curse, no foreign energy, no spellwork. Nothing that suggests someone interfered with your power."

I released a slow breath. "So it was me."

She hesitated. "Not exactly."

"What does that mean?"

"Your power itself is unstable. Something triggered the fluctuation, but I can't identify what it is."

My stomach tightened. "So I could lose control again."

"You possibly could."

The word settled heavily between us. I looked down at my hands. Elona's frightened face flashed through my mind.

The healer noticed. "You're blaming yourself for what happened to your daughter."

"I almost hurt her."

She placed her hand on mine. "But you stopped it."

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"After she was thrown across the ground."

The healer's expression softened. "Alpha, she wasn't injured."

I nodded. I knew that, but knowing it didn't erase the memory.

I was leaving the healer's chamber when I heard small footsteps behind me.

"Mommy?"

I turned. Elona stood in the doorway. My chest tightened.

"Elona."

She smiled nervously before walking toward me. I immediately knelt.

"Are you okay?"

She nodded. "Dad said you were worried."

I swallowed. "I was."

She wrapped her arms around my neck. I froze for a second before hugging her tightly.

"I'm sorry."

She pulled back. "You don't have to be sorry."

"I scared you."

"You didn't mean to do that."

My eyes stung. "Are you sure you're not hurt?"

She shook her head. "I'm okay." She placed both hands on my cheeks. "See?"

A laugh escaped me despite myself. "You're really okay?"

She nodded. "I'm really okay, Mommy."

Thugged her again. This time, I held her as though I could protect her from everything simply by keeping my arms around her.

Lydia's voice softened. Our pup is strong.

She is.

I kissed Elona's hair. "Thank you for coming to see me."

"Of course." She pulled back slightly. "You're my mom."

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Her simple answer broke something inside me. I closed my eyes. For a moment, I just held her.

That night, Damon and I sat together in my office. The room was quiet except for the faint crackle

of the fireplace. Damon had been unusually silent. I could tell he was worried.

I finally broke the silence. "You look troubled."

He lifted his eyes to mine. "It is about Viktor. Something about him doesn't feel right."

I sighed. "Damon."

"I think he might have a hand in what's happening to your powers."

I furrowed my brows. "Why would you even think that?"

He leaned back in his chair, his jaw tightening. "The timing, Aria. Viktor becomes your Beta, and just a few weeks down the line, you lose control of your powers."

I shook my head. "That doesn't prove anything."

"No." His expression remained serious. "But it concerns me. We also can't dismiss the fact that he has been acting strange. Always trying to interfere whenever you are with me."

I rubbed my forehead. "There is no concrete evidence that links him to what happened with my powers. I can't act against him based on suspicion."

Damon nodded. He didn't argue. That surprised me. Instead, he reached across the desk and took

my hand.

"Fine, but promise me something."

“What is that?” I asked.

“Until we understand what’s happening with your power, keep your distance from Viktor.”

I frowned. “Damon...”

“I’m not asking you to accuse him. I’m asking you to be careful.”

I stared at our joined hands. His thumb moved slowly across my knuckles.

“I don’t like the way he has been behaving around you, and I definitely don’t like that your power became unstable shortly after you’ve been dealing with him.”

I looked into his eyes. “You really think he’s involved?”

“I think something is wrong.” He paused. “And until we know what that something is, I don’t want to take chances with you.”

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The mate bond warmed between us.

sighed. “All right. I’ll keep my distance.”

His shoulders relaxed. “Thank you.” He squeezed my hand. “That’s all I need.”

I turned toward the window, the uneasiness returning. The healer had found no external interference.

There was no poison, curse, or foreign energy, yet my power had behaved as though something inside me had been awakened.

I didn’t know what it was, but I knew one thing. Whatever had stirred inside me wasn’t finished, and until I discovered what it wanted, I couldn’t afford to let my guard down.

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Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 329

Akia's POV

I didn't tell Viktor about the conversation I'd had with Damon. I didn't tell him that I was watching him, and I certainly didn't tell him that I had begun questioning whether his recent behavior was connected to the instability in my power.

If Viktor was innocent, I had no intention of accusing him without evidence. If he wasn't... I needed proof.

So I decided to test him, not openly as his Alpha, but as an observer.

The opportunity came during a routine training exercise. Several warriors were preparing for a

simulated border breach. I reviewed the formation, then looked toward Viktor.

"You're taking the eastern route."

He nodded. "Understood."

"You'll be alone."

That made him pause for half a second. "Alone?"

"Yes." I kept my expression neutral. "There will be no backup team. I want to see how you handle a

breach without immediate support."

His eyes met mine. Then he nodded. "Understood, Alpha."

Lydia stirred. Watch him.

I would.

The exercise began. Viktor shifted almost immediately. His bones cracked as his body

transformed, fur spreading across his skin until a large wolf stood where he had been. He took off

toward the eastern boundary.

I watched from the command point. Everything about his movements was precise. He reached

the simulated breach within minutes. The opposing warriors attacked.

Viktor didn't hesitate. He dodged the first strike, knocked another warrior aside, and used the

terrain to separate the remaining fighters. There was no wasted movement, hesitation, or unnecessary aggression. He completed the objective faster than expected.

I narrowed my eyes. Anything?

Lydia remained silent for several seconds. Nothing at all.

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The exercise continued. Viktor encountered a second simulated threat. Again, he responded perfectly. He never exposed his back, never broke formation, and never ignored an instruction.

When the exercise ended, he returned to the training grounds and shifted back. His expression

was calm, his pulse even. The others clapped him on the shoulder as he rejoined the group.

I stayed where I was, arms folded, watching the easy way he accepted their praise.

I left the command point and walked toward him. Viktor met my eyes without flinching.

"Good work," I said. My voice stayed even. "You handled that cleanly."

He inclined his head. "Thank you, Alpha. The fight was tough. I almost lost it twice."

Almost. The word sat wrong in my ears. Almost implied he had struggled. I had seen none.

“Next time, I’ll make it harder,” I answered, forcing a small smile. “Get some water. We’re running the perimeter again at dusk.”

He nodded and moved off with the others. I stayed behind, staring at the scuffed earth where he’d

stood.

I still had nothing. No proof, no evidence, nothing that could justify confronting him, and that was

what frustrated me most.

Viktor had performed flawlessly throughout the exercise. His only mistake had been the tiny lie he had told about almost losing twice. I couldn’t build an accusation on that.

So I withdrew my direct suspicion for now. But that didn’t mean I trusted him. In fact, something about his perfection bothered me. He was always prepared, always controlled, always exactly

where he needed to be.

He was too perfect.

Lydia gave a low growl inside me. Perfect wolves hide imperfect intentions.

I stared toward the forest. That’s what scares me.

I turned away from the training grounds. Viktor had passed my test, at least on the surface. But

somehow, I felt even less comfortable around him than before.

Because if he was hiding something, he was very good at it, and if he wasn’t... then I had another

problem. I was beginning to distrust someone who had given me no reason to.

Either way, I couldn’t afford to stop watching him.

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Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 330

Aria's POV

Chwin

Astrid, my best friend, officially joined the Grayson Pack the following week. Her arrival was met with relief. We needed more healers, more people who understood logistics, and more hands to help coordinate the growing alliance.

Astrid had experience in both areas, which made her an obvious addition.

I found Astrid in the medical wing that afternoon, sleeves rolled up, sorting through crates of supplies with the same quiet efficiency she'd always had. The sharp scent of antiseptic and dried

herbs filled the air.

"You're settling in quickly," I said.

She looked up and smiled. "I am. Things run smoothly here. You've done a lot of work holding this

pack together."

"Thank you. I didn't do it alone." I glanced toward the open doorway, then stepped closer and dropped my voice. "I need you to do something for me."

Her expression immediately became serious. "What?"

"I want you to keep an eye on Viktor."

Astrid's eyebrows rose. "Viktor?"

I nodded. "Don't confront him. Don't make it obvious. Just watch how he behaves, who he talks to,

where he goes, anything that feels off."

"Do you suspect him?"

"I don't know." That was the truth. "I've noticed some things, but I have no evidence. I don't want to

accuse him based on suspicion."

Astrid studied me and frowned. "I don't understand, Aria. Why ask me?"

"I've been watching him too closely, but I need distance from him." My voice lowered. "Something

about him has been bothering me, and I don't trust myself to judge it clearly anymore."

Astrid nodded slowly. "All right. I'll keep an eye on him."

"Thank you." I squeezed her shoulder. "But be careful."

She smiled. "I can handle myself."

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"I know." I just wasn't sure she understood what I was asking her to watch.

Over the next several days, Astrid and Viktor began working together frequently. It was exactly what I wanted, and it gave me the distance I needed.

I stopped seeking Viktor out. I stopped allowing him to accompany me everywhere. When he appeared beside me, I found an excuse to send him somewhere else, and slowly, the strange

tension I had been feeling around him began to fade..

Also, with the distance between us, the strange pull I felt toward him began to disappear too.

A week later, Astrid found me in the command room. She dropped a stack of documents onto my

desk.

"You're going to love this."

I looked at the papers. "Please tell me it's not another supply report."

"Unfortunately, it is."

I groaned. Astrid laughed before sitting opposite me.

“I’ve also been watching Viktor.”

My attention sharpened. “What did you find?”

She shrugged. “Nothing. He’s fine.”

I stared at her. “Fine?”

She nodded. “He’s respectful, he’s disciplined, he works hard, and also treats everyone properly.

There is nothing strange about him at all.”

I leaned back. “Are you sure?”

Astrid smiled. “Aria, I spent an entire week around the man. If he’s hiding something, he’s extremely

good at it.”

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I frowned.

Astrid continued. “Honestly, I think you’ve been suspicious of him because you’re looking for

something that isn’t there.” She leaned forward. “He’s actually a good man.”

My eyes narrowed. “You’re defending him.”

“I’m telling you what I observed.”

I studied her face. She seemed completely sincere. But then I noticed something. The way she smiled when she mentioned him, the slight warmth in her voice, the faint flush on her cheeks she

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hadn’t had before.

Lydia’s attention snapped sharp. She’s soft on him, my wolf said flatly.

My stomach dropped. “Wait.”

Astrid blinked. “What?”

“Do you like him?”

She stared at me. “What? No.”

“You hesitated, Astrid. You like him.”

She laughed nervously. “He’s attractive. That’s all.”

I immediately sat upright. “Astrid, you need to stop watching him.”

Her eyes widened. “Why?”

I didn’t know how to explain it. There was something about Viktor that didn’t fit, and now I remembered something I’d noticed before. I remembered the way women in the pack already angled toward him without meaning to.

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I remembered the pull I’d felt myself and deliberately starved. If Astrid was starting to feel it too...

I looked at Astrid. “Just stop. I’ll handle it myself from here.”

She frowned. “Aria, you’re overreacting.”

“Maybe I am.” I stood. “But I’m not taking chances. I can’t have you get hurt if he’s not what he seems.”

She sighed. “Fine. I’ll stop.”

I relaxed. “Good.”

Astrid shook her head. “You know, sometimes I think you’re impossible.”

“Maybe I am.”

She smiled despite herself. “But I’ll listen.”

After she left, I remained standing beside my desk. I stared at the empty space she’d occupied and

felt the decision settle cold and clear in my chest.

Back to me, I told Lydia.

Yes, she answered. We watch him ourselves.

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No more distance, no more proxies. If Viktor was hiding something, I would find it.

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Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 331

Axia's POV

I left days later at first light, the Grayson territory falling away behind me as I crossed into my mother's family lands.

I had spent days trying to understand what was happening to me. One moment, my power was under control. The next, it surged through my veins without warning, making my wolf feel as though she was fighting to break free.

The head of my mother's family was waiting for me inside the ancestral hall. He gestured toward

the chair opposite him.

"Sit, Aria."

I obeyed. For the next several minutes, I told him everything. The sudden fluctuations in my power, the pressure in my chest, the moments when Lydia became unusually aggressive, the strange sensations I'd experienced whenever I approached the altar.

And, finally, I told him about Viktor and how I suspected he had something to do with it.

The head of the family listened without interrupting. When I finished, he leaned back slowly.

“Your suspicion of Viktor is understandable,” he said. “But it is misplaced.”

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

His expression hardened. “Your power fluctuations are coming from the altar at the Grayson land.”

My heart skipped. “The altar?”

He nodded. “The seal surrounding it has been touched repeatedly over the years. Every interaction

weakens it slightly. Recently, that weakening reached a critical point.” He paused. “There is now a

fissure in the seal.”

The head of the family continued, “Because you are the person most closely connected to the

altar, you felt the damage before anyone else did.”

I looked down at my hands. “So Viktor had nothing to do with it?”

“Not according to what you’ve told me.”

I released a breath I hadn’t realized I’d been holding. Guilt immediately followed. I’d accused Viktor in my mind without having any real proof.

I’d watched him differently, questioned his intentions, and wondered whether he’d somehow been

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manipulating my power. All because I couldn’t understand what was happening to me.

“Can it be repaired?” I asked.

“In time, with the right hands. Until then, expect the surges to continue. Guard your control and

stop looking for enemies where there are none.”

Clair

I nodded slowly. At least now I understood. The problem hadn't been Viktor. It had been the altar.

When I finally left the territory, Lydia remained unusually quiet. You owe him an apology.

I sighed. I know.

And you should stop accusing people without proof.

I frowned. You sound very wise today.

She huffed. Someone has to be.

I rolled my eyes. Despite everything, a small smile tugged at my lips.

By the time I returned, Viktor was waiting. The moment he saw me, his expression changed

slightly.

"You're back."

I stopped in front of him. For a moment, I didn't know how to begin. Then I forced myself to meet

his eyes.

"I owe you an apology."

His brows lifted. "For what?"

"I suspected you."

He said nothing.

I continued, "I thought your presence might have something to do with my power fluctuations. I

was wrong."

Viktor studied me for a few seconds. "What changed your mind?"

I hesitated. He didn't need to know everything. "I found out what was really happening."

He nodded once. "I see."

"I shouldn't have suspected you without evidence."

Viktor's expression softened. "Apology accepted."

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That was it. No anger, no questions. He didn't ask what had made me suspicious in the first place

or how I'd discovered the truth. Somehow, that made me feel even worse.

"You're not going to ask anything?"

He shook his head. "No."

I frowned. "Why?"

He gave me a faint smile. "Because you came to me yourself, confessed, and admitted you were wrong. That's enough."

Lydia stirred quietly inside me. I like him.

I almost groaned. You weren't this supportive when I suspected him.

I was waiting for proof.

I rolled my eyes. Finally, the tension inside my chest eased. But as I looked toward the distant territory where the altar stood, I couldn't shake the feeling that this was only the beginning.

Something had cracked, and whatever was behind that seal might not remain contained for much

longer.

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Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 332

Chairs

Aria's POV

The seal was getting worse. I could feel it. Every day, the pressure beneath the land grew stronger, and my power became more unstable.

Lydia felt it too. It's spreading. We need to be careful.

I clenched my jaw. I'm trying.

Trying wasn't enough anymore. My power no longer behaved like something I could simply control.

It came in waves.

Sometimes, I could feel it building beneath my skin hours before it erupted. Other times, there was

no warning at all.

Damon had been helping me through it. Whenever my power surged, the mate bond between us became my anchor. He had become annoyingly good at knowing when I was about to lose control.

His presence could cut through the chaos inside my mind better than anything else.

But this time, the warning signs had been different. We were in the main meeting room with several members of the pack when the pressure suddenly slammed into me.

My entire body stiffened. The air seemed to disappear from my lungs.

Lydia snarled inside me. Aria!

I gripped the edge of the table. Joshua noticed.

"Aria, are you okay?" he asked.

“I’m fine.”

The lie barely left my mouth before another wave hit. Power surged through my veins. My vision

blurred. The wooden table beneath my fingers groaned.

Damon immediately stood. “Everyone, step back.” His Alpha command rolled through the room.

The others obeyed, retreating several steps.

I shook my head. “No... Don’t.”

Damon looked at me. “Aria.”

“I can handle it.” My voice trembled. I needed to handle it. I couldn’t keep depending on Damon

every time my power slipped.

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I closed my eyes and reached inward. I tried to pull the energy back, but nothing happened. My power surged harder. The windows rattled.

Alow growl escaped Lydia. It is too much. I’m trying to pull it back. It’s not listening.

My fingers curled into fists. “Come on...”

I forced every ounce of concentration into controlling the energy. For one brief second it worked. The pressure receded. Then it exploded.

A violent wave of power burst from my body. The room shook. Several people stumbled backward. Someone cried out as chairs scraped across the floor.

Damon moved immediately. “Aria!”

“Damon, stay back!”

He ignored my warning and rushed toward me, his eyes flashing with the golden glow of his Alpha power. The mate bond between us flared. Warmth rushed through my chest.

Look at me.

I tried. Damon reached me and grabbed my shoulders. "Focus on me."

"I can't!"

"Yes, you can."

The power around me continued to lash outward. Damon planted his feet firmly. His wolf, Rhein, pushed forward beneath his skin.

She's losing control.

I know, Damon answered silently.

Damon pulled me closer. The moment he did, something inside me snapped. My power reacted

instinctively. A violent burst of energy shot from my body. Damon was thrown backward.

"Damon!" I screamed.

He hit the floor hard. For a second, everything stopped. Then I saw the blood. A deep cut ran across his arm. My heart dropped.

"No."

I rushed toward him, but Lydia screamed inside my head. Stay away from him! You hurt him!

I froze. Damon pushed himself upright.

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"I'm fine."

"No, you are not. You're bleeding."

"It's just a wound."

"Just a wound?" My voice broke.

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I stared at the blood dripping from his arm. I had done that. I had hurt Damon. The man who had been trying to help me.

The man who had stood beside me every time my power became unstable, and I had attacked

him. Without meaning to. Without even being able to stop myself.

“I’m so sorry.”

Damon stepped toward me. I immediately backed away. “Don’t apologize.”

He stopped. “Aria...”

“Don’t come near me.”

His brows furrowed. “You didn’t do this intentionally.”

“But I did it... I hurt you.”

Damon looked at his arm before meeting my eyes again. “You lost control. That’s different.”

I shook my head. “No, it’s not.”

The power was still moving beneath my skin. Lydia whimpered. Aria...

I couldn’t answer her. All I could see was the blood on Damon’s arm. All I could think about was

how easily that burst could have done something worse. What if I had killed him?

The thought made my stomach twist. Before I could regain control, another surge ripped through

I screamed. “Everyone, please leave!”

The power exploded outward again, sending another tremor through the room.

“I don’t want to hurt anyone!”

The pack members didn’t need to be told twice. They rushed toward the exit, keeping their

distance from me as they hurried out.

Within moments, the room had almost emptied.

Only Damon, Joshua, Ronan, and Viktor remained. I looked at them through the haze of power

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surrounding me.

“Why are you still here?”

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Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 333

Aria's POV

Damon's gaze never left mine. “I'm not leaving you, Aria.”

My heart clenched hard enough to hurt. “Damon, you need to leave. I already hurt you. I don't want

to do that again.”

I glanced at the others, my father, Joshua, and Viktor.

“Please, all of you... Go.”

“No, Aria.” Joshua's voice was firm. “I'm not leaving.”

“Neither am I.” My father's tone remained calm and unwavering. “Fight this. You can do it. You're stronger than you know.”

“Yes, Aria. Fight it,” Joshua added.

I shook my head, a groan escaping me as another tremor ran through my hands.

“I can’t.”

The shaking wouldn’t stop. Another pulse of energy rolled through me, and I winced as heat flared beneath my skin, sharp and wild.

Damon’s eyes flashed silver. He moved forward. Panic slammed into me.

“No, Damon... stay away!”

Power exploded outward before I could stop it.

Damon halted mid-step, forced back by the invisible pressure. The brief flash of fear in his eyes made my chest ache.

He shook his head and took another step anyway.

“I can’t do that.”

“You’re bleeding because of me.” I backed farther away, my voice breaking. “If I lose control again, I could do something worse.”

His jaw tightened. “Then I’ll take the risk.”

He closed more of the distance.

“No...” I breathed.

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Before he could reach me, another body stepped between us.

It was Viktor. He didn’t ask permission. He simply moved into place.

“Look at me,” he said, his voice low and steady.

I dragged my gaze up to his.

“You don’t need to fight the power. You’re forcing it down. That’s why it’s pushing back.”

Another surge tore through me. I gasped. Viktor stepped closer.

“Let it settle.”

I shook my head. “I can’t.”

“You can.”

One hand settled against the back of my neck while the other rested lightly against my shoulder.

The effect was immediate. His presence grounded the chaos, giving the wild energy somewhere

to settle instead of allowing it to tear through me.

That’s better, Lydia sighed inside my head.

I closed my eyes. How is he doing this?

He’s giving the energy somewhere to settle.

I focused on the steady pressure of Viktor’s hands and the calm weight of his presence. Slowly, the

violent energy inside me began to lose its edge.

“Take slow breaths,” he murmured.

I inhaled and exhaled again and again.

My forehead dropped against his chest without conscious thought. The tremors in my limbs

gradually slowed, and the burning beneath my skin eased just enough for me to think clearly again.

Viktor didn’t move. “You’re doing great,” he said quietly. “Keep breathing.”

Then Damon’s fury slammed through the mate bond like a physical blow.

When I lifted my head, his face had gone rigid. The muscle in his jaw ticked sharply, and Rhein’s

presence surged so violently that the air around us seemed to thicken.

“Get your hands off her. Now.” Damon’s voice was dangerously soft.

Viktor didn’t move. His thumb stroked once, almost absently, along the side of my neck.

“She’s stabilizing,” he said evenly. “If I step away too soon, she could still shift.”

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Damon’s eyes flashed pure silver. “I said...”

“Enough.”

The single word cut across the room. My father stood solidly beside Joshua. Damon’s attention

snapped toward them, the challenge already rising in his expression.

Ronan met the Alpha’s stare without flinching.

“Your personal feelings are clouding the only thing that matters right now.”

Joshua stepped forward, his voice quieter but no less firm.

“She’s right. Aria needs whatever contact works. If Viktor can keep her from losing control, you

don’t get to forbid it just because it makes you angry.”

Damon’s hands curled into fists at his sides. The tension rolling off him was sharp and cold, but

beneath the rage, I could feel something else through the mate bond.

Fear... Fear layered beneath his anger, fear that another male’s touch had accomplished what his presence alone sometimes couldn’t.

Lydia pressed against my ribs, protective and conflicted.

He hates this, and he’s not wrong to. But you were about to break.

I stayed where I was, still half-leaning into Viktor’s steady hold, my pulse slowly settling.

Damon's gaze found mine again across the space between us. The mate bond throbbed between us. It was raw, unsettled, and aching.

Then Damon slowly exhaled. "Fine." His voice was cold. "But this is the last time I allow it. There

has to be another way, and we will find it."

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Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 334

Aria's POV

Clark

The next morning, I returned to my mother's family's territory. I hadn't slept much. Every time I closed my eyes, I saw Damon's blood. Then I saw Viktor's hands on my shoulders, steadying me when my power had nearly torn through the room.

Beneath it all, I could still feel the unstable energy in my blood.

The head of my mother's family was already waiting for me when I entered the hall

He studied me for a long moment. "You have come back."

"I need a solution to my loss of control. It has gotten worse."

He motioned for me to sit. I remained standing.

"I don't want another explanation. I already know the seal is weakening. I know the altar is affecting

His gaze sharpened. "Then perhaps you're looking in the wrong place."

"What does that mean?"

"You keep treating your power as an enemy. It is not."

I frowned. "Why, then, does it keep attacking me?"

"No." He shook his head. "Your power is responding to you."

I stared at him. He continued, "The root of your instability isn't simply the weakening seal. It's your subconscious fear of your own power."

My chest tightened. "That's ridiculous."

"Is it?"

I didn't answer.

He leaned forward. "Tell me what you felt when your power surged."

"I was afraid of hurting someone."

"Only that?" he asked.

His question struck deeper than I expected. I clenched my hands. Lydia became unusually quiet.

The old memories surfaced. My mother, the altar, the stories I'd heard about what had happened

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to her. The thought that whatever power had consumed her might one day consume me too.

My throat tightened. "I don't want to become like my mother."

He nodded slowly. "There it is."

I looked at him sharply. "What?"

"Your fear isn't simply that your power will hurt someone. You fear that your power will devour you."

You believe the altar will consume you the way it consumed your mother.”

I swallowed. “Maybe.”

“And every time you feel its energy, you resist it.”

“Of course I do.”

“That resistance creates conflict. Your power pushes forward. You push back. The result is instability.”

I stared at him. “So what am I supposed to do?”

“Accept it.”

My expression hardened. “Accept it?”

“Accept all of it.” He gestured toward my chest. “Your power is yours, Aria. Stop treating it as something separate from yourself.”

He stood. “The altar isn’t your enemy. Your fear is. Until you stop fearing it, you will never control it.”

My eyes narrowed. Why was he asking me to accept all my powers? Perhaps that was exactly

what he wanted.

If I accepted every ounce of my power, what would happen? Would I strengthen the bond with the altar? Would I break the remaining seal? Was this advice actually a way to make me do what

someone else couldn’t?

Lydia growled. Don’t trust him. He’s asking you to open a door we don’t understand.

I nodded faintly. “I need time.”

The head of the family didn’t argue. “Take it.”

I turned toward the door.

“Aria.”

I stopped.

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“Fear can protect you,” he said. “But fear can also become a cage.”

didn’t respond. I left.

Clair

When I returned to the pack, the tension between Damon and Viktor was still there. I could

practically smell it. Damon stood near the windows, his arms crossed over his chest. Viktor was

on the other side of the room. Neither looked pleased to see the other.

The second I stepped inside, both pairs of eyes locked on me.

Damon’s voice was quiet. “You’re back.”

“I’m back.”

Viktor straightened. “Did they give you anything useful?”

I hesitated. The truth sat heavy on my tongue.

“They said the problem is me. That I’m still fighting my own power because I’m afraid of ending up like my mother.”

Damon’s jaw flexed. “What’s their solution?”

“Accept all of it. Stop holding back.”

Silence stretched. Lydia pressed closer to the surface.

He’s watching you the way he always does when you’re near that man. Like he’s measuring every

breath.

I looked at Viktor. For a moment, the memory of his hand at the back of my neck, the way the

chaos had quieted under his touch, rose unbidden. There had been something steady there.

Something that had pulled at me when the fear was loudest.

I was drawn to him. I could admit that much, at least to myself.

Then Damon moved.

He crossed the space between us in three strides and stopped just close enough that the mate bond flared. His scent wrapped around me.

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Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 335

Aria's POV

Rhein's presence brushed against Lydia's, not demanding, just there.

The pull toward Viktor didn't vanish in a dramatic rush. It simply... faded. Like a secondary note

drowned out by a stronger chord.

Clau

I exhaled. Being near Damon felt different and natural. Like my body recognized the space it was supposed to occupy. The constant low-level strain of fighting myself eased without anyone having

to ground me first.

Lydia rumbled in quiet agreement. This is where we settle, not the other.

I met Damon's eyes.

"I felt something with him," I said, because lying would only make the fracture worse. "When everything was slipping yesterday. It helped, I won't pretend it didn't."

Damon's expression tightened, but he didn't interrupt.

“But the second I’m with you, it doesn’t hold the same weight.” I glanced once toward Viktor, then back. “With you it feels... easier. Like I don’t have to keep bracing for the next surge just to stay

upright.”

Viktor’s face remained unreadable. Damon, though, let out a slow breath. Some of the lethal tension in his shoulders eased, though the possessive edge in the bond didn’t disappear.

“Then we find another way,” Damon said. “One that doesn’t require his hands on you every time the

power rises.”

I nodded. The head of my mother’s house had offered one path. I still didn’t trust it. But standing

here, the mate bond humming steady between us, I knew which presence felt like home.

And which one, for all its temporary calm, did not.

—

The vampires had been testing our borders constantly, probing the surrounding packs for weaknesses and looking for a way through our defenses.

But our joint-defense plan had finally started working. Patrols from neighboring packs rotated through vulnerable territories. Communication lines were strengthened. Warriors were stationed where the vampires had attacked most frequently.

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Every time the vampires tried to push through, they met resistance, and every time they retreated, we learned something new.

I stood over the large map in the strategy room, studying the markings scattered across the

territories. Damon stood beside me.

“They haven’t attacked this route in three days,” he said.

“Because they know we’ll be waiting.”

He nodded. “Exactly.”

I traced my finger along the border. “They’re changing tactics.”

Damon glanced at me. “You think they’ll try somewhere else?”

“I know they will.”

Lydia stirred inside me. They’re testing us, but we’re stronger now.

I smiled faintly. We are.

Viktor entered the room. “Alpha Aria.”

I turned. “What is it?”

“The Council sent a message. They will reconvene tomorrow,” he said. “They’re ready to rule on the

territory’s standing.”

My pulse kicked hard.

Damon was already at my side, silent, the steady weight of the mate bond a quiet anchor. Rhein’s

presence brushed against Lydia’s in silent support.

The next day, Damon and I left for the Werewolf Council.

The Council chamber was packed when we arrived. Alphas from several territories were present,

along with Council representatives. Noah and Ryder were also present.

The moment I entered, conversations quieted. I kept my head high even though my heart was

pounding.

Damon walked beside me. The mate bond between us gave me a steady warmth.

I’m here. His voice brushed against my mind.

I know.

Whatever happens, don't face it alone.

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I took a breath.

The eldest Council representative rose. "Aria Grayson."

I stepped forward. "Yes."

Claim

"Over the past several weeks, wolfkind has faced repeated attacks from vampire forces. Despite those attacks, your defense strategy has protected not only your own territory but several

neighboring packs."

I said nothing.

He continued. "Your joint-defense plan has significantly reduced vampire incursions."

A murmur moved through the chamber. Then he said the words I never expected to hear.

"The Council has reached a formal decision."

My fingers tightened.

"We recognize the Grayson territory as an independent Alpha territory under your leadership."

There was silence. For a moment, I couldn't breathe. Damon looked at me. His eyes were filled

with pride.

The Council representative continued. "Aria Grayson, you are hereby formally recognized as an

Alpha."

The room erupted. Some wolves applauded. Others stood. Several Alphas bowed their heads.

I stared at the Council. “You’re serious?”

The representative smiled faintly. “We are.”

My throat tightened. For generations, female wolves had been expected to stand beside an Alpha,

to be Luna, and to support the pack. But never to hold formal Alpha authority. Until now.

Lydia’s voice trembled inside me. We did it.

I swallowed. We did.

Tears burned my eyes. The representative raised his voice.

“This marks the first formal recognition of a female werewolf as an Alpha in wolf history.”

The words echoed through the chamber. I looked around. Some faces held admiration. Some held

disbelief. A few still held resistance. But none of that mattered.

I had earned this.

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Clair

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 336

Aria’s POV

Noah stepped forward first. The carefully neutral mask he usually wore had softened.”

Congratulations, Aria. You forced the old ways to move. Not many could have done it.”

Ryder followed a step behind him, giving a short, respectful nod. “Well fought. The borders are quieter because of you. That earns recognition, whether the traditionalists like it or not.”

Damon moved closer, his voice low enough for only me to hear. “I’m proud of you.”

I looked at him, then glanced at Noah and Ryder as well. “I couldn’t have done it without you. All of

you. Thank you for always being there.”

They all smiled.

Damon’s mouth curved. “You would have found a way even without us.”

“That’s right,” Noah added. “You always do.”

Ryder gave a quiet chuckle. “I agree.”

Lydia purred inside me. They’re absolutely right.

The Council representative raised a hand, restoring order. “The formal confirmation ceremony will take place on the coming moon-phase turning day.”

—

The day of the confirmation ceremony soon arrived. I felt uneasy, like something terrible was going

to happen.

The ceremonial hall was already filled with pack members and Council representatives.

Conversations echoed beneath the high ceiling while guards stood along the walls. The scent of wolves, candles, polished wood, and ceremonial herbs filled the air.

Damon stood several feet away, dressed in formal black. His Alpha aura was restrained, but I could

still feel it. The moment our eyes met, the mate bond warmed between us.

His lips curved slightly. “You look nervous.”

“I am.”

He walked toward me. “There’s nothing to be nervous about.”

I gave him a skeptical look. “That’s exactly what people say before something goes terribly wrong.”

He chuckled. “I’ll be right beside you.”

Lydia relaxed slightly. He’s here, right beside us.

I know.

Damon reached for my hand. His fingers closed around mine. The warmth of the mate bond

spread through me. For a moment, the uneasiness disappeared.-

Then someone announced that the ceremony was beginning. I took my place. The ceremonial

wine was brought out.

A silver tray was carried toward me, and one of the attendants stopped in front of me.

“Alpha Aria.”

I accepted the glass. The wine was dark red, almost black beneath the candlelight. I lifted it toward my lips and took a sip. The taste was sweet, then bitter.

A second later, fire tore through my veins.

Claud

I gasped. The glass slipped from my fingers and shattered against the floor. Damon immediately

turned toward me.

“Aria?”

I doubled over. My heart slammed against my ribs. Power erupted beneath my skin.

“What...”

I couldn’t finish the sentence.

Lydia screamed. The drink. Something was put in it!

I grabbed my chest. The energy I'd spent days trying to control suddenly surged violently. It wasn't

a wave. It was a flood. My knees buckled. Damon caught me before I hit the ground.

"Aria!"

"Get away!"

He ignored me. "What's happening?"

"I don't know!"

Power exploded from my body. Damon was forced backward. Gasps filled the hall. People began

moving away from me. I heard someone shout, "Get the healers!"

My claws pushed through my fingertips. My vision blurred. The energy kept building. I tried to pull

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it back, but it was useless.

Lydia!

I can't stop it!

Please, try again!

Cla

I reached inward. The moment I touched the power, it surged harder. I screamed.

Then the doors exploded inward. Everyone turned. A group of vampires stormed into the hall. Their eyes glowed crimson. Their fangs were exposed as they charged.

"Protect the Alphas!"

"Vampires!"

Chaos erupted. Wolves shifted instantly. Growls filled the room as warriors attacked the invading vampires. But the vampires weren't interested in the crowd.

Their eyes were fixed on one person. Elona.

I saw her standing near the back of the hall. A vampire broke through the line.

"Take the girl!"

Damon's expression changed. "Elona!"

He moved toward her. I tried to follow, but my power exploded again. A massive wave of energy tore through the hall. The floor cracked beneath my feet. The windows shattered.

Every vampire within range was thrown backward. One slammed into the wall hard enough to c***k the stone. Another flew across the room and crashed through a table.

The attacking force staggered. For several seconds, nobody moved.

I stared at my hands. The energy around me was no longer golden. It was brighter, denser, almost

blinding.

Lydia's voice trembled. Aria...

What did I do?

You stopped them.

I looked around. The vampires were retreating. But so were the wolves. Several people had been

knocked unconscious by the blast. Others were struggling to get back onto their feet.

My stomach dropped. I hadn't just driven the vampires away. I'd hit everyone.

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Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 337

Aria's POV

My eyes immediately went to Elona. She was crying. A warrior had pulled her behind him, shielding her from the chaos, but I could still see the fear on her little face. My heart broke.

I took a step toward her.

Lydia whimpered. Aria, don't go near her. You might hurt her again.

I stopped. Lydia was right. Elona could get hurt if I moved too close.

Damon approached me carefully. "Aria."

I looked at him. "Take Elona. Keep her safe."

His eyes searched mine. Through the bond, I felt the immediate refusal, the Alpha instinct to stay at my side.

"Aria..."

"Please." My voice was rough. "If I lose it again, I won't be able to stop myself in time. I need you to take her away from here."

Damon's jaw flexed once. Then he gave a single nod, already moving.

"Alright. I will do that and come back."

I watched him reach Elona, scoop her up, and retreat toward the safer ridge where the remaining pack members held formation. Only then did I turn fully toward the retreating vampires.

Lydia surged forward, fierce and focused. They're running. Don't let them regroup.

I didn't intend to. I ran after them. My body moved faster than it ever had. The night air struck my face as I burst outside.

The vampires were already disappearing into the forest. I chased them. My senses sharpened. I could hear every footstep, every branch snapping beneath their feet, every heartbeat.

I drove them farther from the borders, past the tree line, into the open stretch where the sun was already climbing.

That was when the first change hit.

My vision sharpened past normal wolf limits. Colors bled differently. The sunlight that should have been nothing more than warmth suddenly pressed against my skin like a low, uncomfortable heat.

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My pulse raced faster than it should have, blood moving in a quick, almost feverish rhythm.

staggered once, catching myself.

Lydia's voice turned sharp with alarm. Aria. Something's wrong.

I lifted a hand to my face. The world looked... different. Brighter at the edges. When I caught my

reflection in a still pool of water near the rocks, my irises were no longer the color I knew. A deeper

crimson was bleeding through them.

Behind me, footsteps approached. Damon. Then several warriors and Council representatives.

They had followed me, and they had seen everything.

One of the Council members stopped dead. His face went pale. "Her eyes..."

Another whispered, "That's not a wolf."

My stomach dropped. Damon's expression hardened.

"What are you talking about?"

The man stared at me. "Look at her blood."

I glanced down. A thin cut across my palm was already closing too quickly. The healing wasn't normal. It wasn't even werewolf healing. It was something else.

I stared at the wound. My breathing became shallow. "No."

Lydia was silent. I could feel her fear. Say something. She didn't.

I looked toward Damon. His eyes were locked on me. "Aria..."

I shook my head. "I don't understand what's going on."

One of the Council representatives took a cautious step backward. "She... she doesn't look like one

of us. She looks like them."

The words hit me like a blow. "What?"

He swallowed. "You are a vampire."

I stared at him. "No." My voice came out barely above a whisper. "I'm a werewolf."

"You are," another Council representative said. "But that isn't all you are."

The realization struck me with terrifying clarity. The strange power from the altar. My mother's history. The wine I took earlier and the change I felt afterward. The sudden change in my body in

response to sunlight.

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pter 337

It was all connected. Something buried inside me had been dormant, and tonight, someone had

awakened it through a drink.

I looked at my hands. The energy around them flickered.

Lydia finally spoke. Aria... what exactly are we?

I stood there under the climbing sun, and in that moment, I understood.

My hidden vampire bloodline was activating.

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Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 338

Arja's POV

Clark

The vampires were gone, but nobody celebrated. Nobody even moved. Everyone was staring at me, at my eyes, at the blood still running beneath my skin, at the impossible thing they had witnessed.

Damon was the first to step forward. "Aria."

I looked at him. His expression was controlled, but I could see the worry in his eyes.

"Don't come closer."

He stopped immediately. "Why?"

"I don't know what I am anymore."

His jaw tightened. "You're still Aria."

I wanted to believe him.

Before I could answer, one of the Council representatives spoke. "She needs to be isolated."

Damon's eyes flashed. "She's not a prisoner."

"No one said she was." The Council member looked at me. "Her condition is unknown. We don't

know what the awakened bloodline can do."

I lowered my gaze. "He's right."

Damon looked at me. "Aria..."

"I need to know what's happening."

I was taken to a private medical room away from the main pack house. The moment the door

closed behind me, I felt completely alone.

A doctor stood beside the examination table, studying the monitors. “How do you feel?”

“Like my body doesn’t belong to me.”

He frowned. “Any pain?”

“Not exactly.” I placed a hand over my chest. “It’s more like... pressure all over my body.”

He examined my eyes first, then my pulse, then my blood. The moment he looked at the results, his

expression changed.

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“What is it, Doctor?”

He looked up at me. “The vampire bloodline in you is highly active. It’s expanding.”

I stared at the wall past his shoulder. “What does that mean for my wolf?”

Clain

He hesitated. “It’s pressing against your wolf nature, weakening the balance. If it continues at this

rate...”

He didn’t finish the sentence. He didn’t need to.

After he left, the room fell silent except for the low hum of the monitoring equipment. I sat on the edge of the examination table, my hands braced on my knees, and reached inward the way I

always had.

Lydia.

There was nothing.

I pushed harder. Lydia. Answer me.

Still nothing.

I could feel her. She was faint and distant, like a presence on the other side of thick glass. The

familiar weight of her was still there, coiled somewhere deep.

But her voice, the constant running commentary, the sharp instincts, the strength that had never

failed to answer, none of it came through.

A wall had gone up between us.

I closed my eyes and tried again, slower this time, pouring every ounce of focus into the bond that

had always been effortless.

Please, Lydia, answer me.

There was silence.

My throat tightened. Lydia remained unreachable.

I didn't know if the separation was temporary, some side effect of the bloodline surging that would fade once the power settled, or if this was the new reality, a permanent distance growing between me and the other half of myself.

I couldn't sit still. The moment the doctor left, I was on my feet. The silence in the room was unbearable. Lydia was still inside me. I could feel her, but I couldn't hear her.

It was like standing outside a locked door and knowing the person on the other side was

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desperately trying to reach me.

Clan

needed answers. So I went back to my mother's family. The head of the house was waiting for me when I arrived. He didn't waste time with soft words.

“Your wolf is being crushed,” he said the moment I stood in front of him. “The vampire bloodline is expanding faster than we estimated. If you don’t find a way to steady the balance soon, Lydia may

not hold out.”

The words landed like a physical blow.

I had felt the silence. I had reached for her and found only that thick, immovable wall. Hearing it

confirmed out loud made the fear sharper.

I didn’t stay to argue. I turned and ran.

Damon caught up to me in the corridor outside, catching my arm. “Aria...where are you going?”

“The altar.” My voice came out raw. “I need to reach Lydia.”

His grip tightened. Concern and fear flashed through the mate bond.

“No. You don’t know what the altar will do now that your vampire bloodline has awakened.”

I pulled free.

“I don’t care.”

I couldn’t lose Lydia, not without fighting.

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Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 339

Akia’s POV

Clai

I ran fast. The forest blurred around me as I pushed my body harder. By the time I reached the altar ruins on Grayson land, my lungs burned.

The ancient stone structure was cracked and partially collapsed, but the energy remained. I could feel it beneath the earth.

I stepped closer. Lydia stirred. I froze.

Lydia?

There was nothing, but I could feel her more clearly. I placed both hands against the stone. The residual energy flowed through me. I closed my eyes..

Lydia.

This time, I felt something, a faint flicker. Like a heartbeat.

My breath caught.

“You’re there.”

No words came, but the presence became stronger. I sank to my knees.

“I know you’re still there.” My fingers tightened around the stone. “You have to fight.”

A faint pulse answered me. Tears burned my eyes.

“Lydia...”

I felt her again. I’m here. The words were so faint I almost wondered if I’d imagined them.

My heart slammed against my ribs. Lydia!

Aria... Her voice was weak and broken, but it was hers.

I laughed through my tears. “I can hear you.”

It won’t be for long.

I swallowed. “I’ll fix this.”

Don’t let them take me.

“I won’t.”

Footsteps sounded behind me. I turned. It was Damon. He rushed toward me, and his expression

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softened when he saw my tears. “Were you able to reach her?”

nodded. “Yes... I can hear her voice, but it is faint.”

Damon crouched beside me. “Can I help?”

I took his hand. The mate bond immediately flared. Warmth spread through my body. Lydia’s presence strengthened.

Damon.

He smiled faintly. “She’s responding.” Damon closed his eyes. “I can feel her through the bond.”

The four of us connected for a brief moment. Me, Damon, Rhein, and Lydia.

Aria. Lydia’s voice became clearer.

I smiled. I’m here. Stay with me.

Damon squeezed my hand. “You hear her?”

I nodded. “Yes.”

Clair

The healer Damon had contacted arrived not long after. He examined the faint residual traces left

in the air, then exchanged a look I didn’t like.

“This is only temporary relief,” the healer said. “The altar’s energy and the mate bond bought you a little ground, nothing more. The vampire bloodline is still expanding. You may lose control again,

possibly worse than before.”

By the time Damon and I returned to the pack, Viktor was already waiting for us.

He met us at the entrance to the main hall, his expression tense.

“The Council has started formal discussions,” he said without preamble. “They’re proposing to reconsider your position as Alpha.”

I stopped cold.

He continued. “Some Council members want to give you time to stabilize. Others aren’t willing to take the risk. They’re citing your loss of control, the injuries, and the vampire traits that surfaced.”

His voice remained level, but I could hear the anger beneath it. “They’re saying you may no longer be entirely wolf and are questioning whether you can remain Alpha.”

Damon’s expression darkened beside me. Through the bond, I felt Rhein’s low, warning growl.

“How can they question your position when they don’t even understand what happened out there?”

Damon demanded.

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Clairy

“They don’t need to understand.” I looked down at my hands, the same hands that had unleashed so much power that crimson had begun to bleed through my eyes. “They’re afraid.”

But they weren’t the only ones who were afraid.

I was afraid too.

Afraid of the vampire bloodline awakening inside me. Afraid of what would happen if I lost control again. Afraid that my powers would eventually become too much for me to contain and destroy everything and everyone I loved.

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Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 340

Axia's POV

I stayed in my room. I didn't want to see anyone. Not Damon, not Viktor, not even my dad or Joshua. I couldn't trust my body.

I sat on the edge of my bed, staring at my hands. They looked normal. That was the terrifying part.

Nothing about them showed the war happening inside me.

The vampire bloodline was awake. Lydia was barely able to reach me, and every time my power

surged, I became a danger to everyone around me.

Aria.

I closed my eyes. I'm here.

Lydia's voice was faint. So faint I had to concentrate just to hear her.

Are you all right?

My chest tightened. I am not, Lydia. I swallowed. I'm afraid I'll lose you.

There was a long silence. Then she whispered, I'm afraid too.

My eyes burned. I wiped my tears away. I couldn't fall apart.

A knock sounded at my door. I didn't answer. Another knock.

"Aria."

It was Damon.

I stared at the door. "Go away."

"I'm not leaving until I talk to you," he said.

My jaw tightened. "I don't want to talk, just leave."

The door opened. Damon stepped inside. His expression was tired, but his eyes were determined.

He closed the door behind him.

“You can’t keep shutting everyone out, Aria. You need help.”

“I’m fine.”

He stared at me. “No, you’re not fine.”

Something inside me snapped. “Then what do you want me to do?”

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Damon didn’t flinch. “Let me help you.”

can’t, Damon.” The words tore out of me. “I’m dangerous. I lost control and hurt Elona. I hurt you

top. I can’t afford to let that happen again.”

Damon took a step toward me. “Aria...”

“Don’t...”

“None of this is your fault, Aria!” His voice rose, echoing off the walls.

I stared at him.

He ran a hand through his hair. “You think pushing me away will keep me safe?”

“Yes, Damon. I don’t know what I’m becoming!” My voice broke. “I don’t know if Lydia will survive. don’t know if my vampire bloodline will take over. I don’t know if the next time I lose control, I’ll hurt

you or someone else.”

Damon moved closer still. “Then we’ll find out together.”

“No.” The words came out sharp. “Get out!”

He froze. “What?”

“Get out!”

His eyes darkened. "I'm not leaving you alone."

"I said leave!"

The mate bond flared between us. For one painful second, I wanted to run into his arms, but fear

won.

"Please."

The anger drained from his face. He stared at me for several seconds. Then he nodded. "Fine."

He walked toward the door. Before he left, he looked back. "You can push me away tonight." His voice was quiet. "But I'll still be here tomorrow."

The door closed. I stared at it. My chest hurt.

You didn't want him to leave. Lydia's voice was barely audible.

I know.

Then why did you make him?

I closed my eyes. Because I can't afford to hurt him again.

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A knock came again. I frowned. "Damon, I said..."

Can

The door opened. It wasn't Damon. Viktor stepped inside. He studied me quietly. Unlike Damon, he

didn't ask questions. He didn't try to convince me. He simply walked closer.

I didn't move away.

"You're still unstable, Aria. You shouldn't be alone," he said.

"I don't want anyone else here."

He nodded. “Then I won’t bring anyone else.”

I looked at him. For some reason, his presence didn’t make me feel trapped. It made the pressure

inside me ease.

Viktor stopped a few steps away. “May I?”

I hesitated. Then nodded. He approached slowly and placed his hand over mine. The strange calm returned. My breathing steadied. The restless energy beneath my skin quieted.

I closed my eyes. It felt so peaceful inside me. I didn’t feel like I was about to break.

So I let Viktor stay.

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Claim

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 341

Aria’s POV

The longer Viktor stayed, the quieter my mind became. After everything that had happened, I was exhausted from fighting myself. My thoughts had been racing since the ceremony, each one colliding with the next until I couldn’t tell fear from instinct anymore.

But now, sitting in the dim light of my room with Viktor by my side, I could finally breathe.

“You’re fighting too hard,” Viktor said quietly, his hand still resting over mine.

I frowned. “What do you mean?”

“You’re treating your power like it is your enemy.”

I looked away. “I don’t have a choice.”

“You do.” His voice was calm. “You’re afraid of the vampire part of yourself because you think

accepting it means losing Lydia.”

My chest tightened. “She is already disappearing.”

“That is because you’re resisting. If you accept your power fully, both parts of you can coexist.”

I looked at him sharply. “What if you’re wrong?”

“Then you’ll still be where you are now.” He leaned closer. “But what if I’m right?”

I didn’t answer.

Viktor continued, “You’ve spent all this time trying to suppress the power inside you. Every time it

rises, you force it back down. That’s why it erupts.”

His words sounded familiar. The head of my mother’s family had said something similar. He had

told me to accept my power and stop fighting it.

Something about Viktor’s words felt different, though. Maybe because I was tired. Maybe because

I wanted desperately to believe there was an easy answer.

“How do I accept it?” I asked.

“Stop separating yourself from it.”

He touched my chest lightly. “The vampire blood is part of you.”

I swallowed.

“Lydia is part of you too.” His eyes remained fixed on mine. “You don’t have to choose between

O

them.”

Hope flickered inside me. “That means I can save her by just accepting my powers.”

“You can.”

Lydia stirred faintly. Aria...

I closed my eyes. I'm here.

Her response was barely more than a whisper. Something feels wrong.

I frowned. What?

There was no answer.

"Lydia?"

There was silence. I opened my eyes again. Viktor was watching me.

"What happened?"

"I can't hear her."

"Then stop forcing the connection." His voice was soothing. "Let her rest."

I hesitated, but my mind felt strangely heavy. My eyelids were becoming difficult to keep open.

I rubbed my forehead. "Why am I so tired?"

"Your body has been through a lot." He spoke gently. "You need to relax."

I tried to sit straighter. "I should call Damon."

Viktor's expression changed for only a moment. "You don't need him right now."

I frowned. "I think I do."

"Aria." His voice was softer now. "You've been relying on everyone else to stabilize you. Damon, Lydia, the altar. You've forgotten that your own power belongs to you."

Clar

The room seemed to tilt. I blinked. Something wasn't right. My thoughts were becoming sluggish. I tried to pull my hand away from his. My fingers barely moved.

"Viktor..."

"I'm here."

"I don't..." The words became tangled. I swallowed. "What did you do?"

“Nothing.” His expression remained calm. “You’re simply exhausted.”

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Clan

I wanted to argue, but my mind couldn’t hold onto the thought. My heartbeat sounded distant. The

room blurred around the edges.

Aria. Lydia. Her voice was faint. Wake up.

I tried. I’m trying.

Every instinct inside me screamed that I should move, but my body wouldn’t respond.

Viktor leaned closer. “You’ve been afraid of your own blood for too long.” His fingers brushed my wrist. “Let me show you what it can really do.”

My pulse jumped. “No.”

The word came out weak. He looked at me. I saw something in his eyes that hadn’t been there

before... Hunger.

My stomach dropped. “Viktor...”

He caught my wrist. I tried to pull away. I couldn’t.

“Relax.”

“No.” My voice was barely audible. “Let me go.

He didn’t. His grip tightened. Then his fangs appeared. My blood ran cold. Panic finally broke

through the fog.

“Viktor!”

He moved before I could scream again. Pain flashed through my wrist, then heat. My breath caught as he bit into my skin. I tried to fight. I tried to summon my power, but nothing happened.

My limbs felt heavy. My thoughts scattered.

Viktor drank my blood. With every second, my strength seemed to drain away. I couldn’t understand why I couldn’t stop him, why my body wouldn’t respond, or why my power remained

silent.

The room blurred completely. My heartbeat slowed. My consciousness slipped further away.

Damon...

The name barely formed in my mind. Then darkness began closing over me. The last thing I felt was Viktor’s grip around my wrist as he continued to drink my blood.

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Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 342

Aria’s POV

Clano

I opened my eyes.

Viktor’s hand was still locked around my wrist. His claws had pierced deep; the metallic tang of my blood hung thick in the air. Yet something was wrong. I felt it in the sudden, almost fragile quiet that had settled over him.

A confused frown cut across his face. The oppressive pressure that had pressed against my skin only moments ago was thinning like smoke in a sudden wind.

Aria. His power is weakening. Lydia's voice was tight, almost hungry.

I know.

I swallowed hard. Viktor released my wrist. He stared at his own hand as if it no longer belonged

to him.

"What..." The word left him in a rough whisper.

I rose carefully and took one measured step back. His breathing had changed. It was ragged and

uneven now. The veins at his temples stood out in sharp relief. The dark energy that once moved

beneath his skin like living smoke had faded to a faint, restless shimmer.

He had fed on my blood. He had probably expected it to make him stronger. Instead, it had done

the opposite.

Our blood rejected him, Lydia growled.

Not just rejected. It weakened him.

A small, cold smile touched the corner of my mouth. Everything finally clicked into place. Every suspicion I had carried like a hidden blade was proving true.

"Why?" Viktor muttered, staring at his trembling fingers. "Why did your blood do this?"

I said nothing.

There was one thing he still did not know. I had never stopped watching him. After the confirmation ceremony, after that tainted wine slid down my throat and left me hollow and unsteady, I had begun to suspect him even more.

I had gone to Damon. Together, we had decided to give Viktor the rope he needed to hang himself.

Earlier, I had sent Damon away under the pretense of needing solitude. I had allowed Viktor to stay.

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Clau

I had let my eyes go vacant. I had worn the mask of a girl under his control, empty and obedient,

while every part of me waited.

Waited for him to grow careless. Waited for him to reveal the truth. Waited for the moment Damon

and the others could strike.

That moment had arrived.

The door exploded inward. A low, bone-deep growl rolled through the room. Viktor's head snapped

toward the sound.

Damon stepped through first. His eyes burned a brilliant, merciless silver. His shoulders were rigid, claws already out. Behind him came Garrick, the oldest wolf, and a line of Grayson warriors, spreading wide until Viktor stood completely surrounded.

My heart slammed against my ribs the instant I saw Damon. He looked at me first, not Viktor... Me. His gaze swept my face, then dropped to the blood still sliding down my wrist.

His jaw locked. "Aria."

"I'm fine," I said quickly.

His nostrils flared. His wolf had already caught the scent of my blood, and the rage that followed

was almost tangible.

Rhein wants to tear him apart, Lydia whispered.

I can feel it.

Despite everything, something warm and fierce flickered in my chest.

Damon's eyes finally shifted to Viktor. The temperature in the room seemed to drop several degrees.

"I always knew there was something wrong with you," Damon said, his voice low and lethal. "You should have known better than to infiltrate this pack pretending to be a rogue when you're nothing but a bloodthirsty vampire on a mission."

Garrick's snarl cut the air. "All this time, you were working against us from the inside."

Viktor looked from Garrick to Damon to the circle of warriors. Then he laughed admiringly.

"Impressive." His gaze settled on me. "So this was your plan."

I held his stare without flinching. "Yes."

"How long?" He tilted his head. "How long have you known?"

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"I confirmed it tonight. But I've suspected you for a long time."

slow smile curved his mouth. "I underestimated you, Aria."

I clenched my injured hand until the sting sharpened. "It all makes sense now."

"Does it?"

Clas

I held his gaze. "You were too interested in my blood. Too interested in my abilities. And every time something went wrong, you somehow knew more than you should have."

Viktor's expression turned thoughtful, almost pleased. "You noticed all that. Interesting." His smile returned, sharper now. "And those theatrics a few moments ago... the vacant eyes, the perfect

obedience. You were never under my control." The amusement drained from his face. "You

deceived me."

"Rich words," I said softly, "coming from the man who has spent months destroying my pack and wolfkind while wearing the face of my Beta. Who exactly deceived whom?"

We stared at each other across the charged silence. Then Viktor glanced down at his hand again. His fingers curled slowly into a fist.

“You knew feeding on your blood would weaken me.”

I smiled. It was small, wicked, and entirely without mercy. “Let’s just say I suspected something

like this might happen.”

That much was true. I had always known my blood carried something unusual.

I had felt it every time my bloodline power surged. I had felt it during the ambush. I had felt it when the suppression weapon tried to smother me, and now I felt it reacting to him, something ancient

and furious inside my veins rejecting the creature who had dared to drink from me.

Viktor lunged at me.

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Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 343

Aria’s POV

Damon was faster.

He slammed into Viktor before the vampire could reach me. The impact sent both of them crashing into the wall hard enough to c***k the plaster. The room erupted.

Viktor snarled and struck. Damon ducked beneath the claws and drove his fist into Viktor’s ribs

The wet c***k of bone rang out clear and sharp.

Viktor staggered. Half the strength he usually carried had been stolen by my blood.

Lydia surged forward, fierce and ready. Go... Take your pound of flesh.

Power flooded my veins in a hot, clean rush. My claws slid free. Every heartbeat in the room became a distinct, thunderous sound.

Damon glanced at me once. I met his eyes and nodded.

Together, we charged at Viktor.

Clairy

At that moment, the doors behind us exploded inward. A deafening crash shook the entire room.

I spun around. My blood ran cold. More figures poured through the door. Their eyes glowed

crimson.

They were all vampires, dozens of them.

“Viktor’s support force,” Joshua snarled.

A vicious smile appeared on Viktor’s face. “You really thought I’d come to your room and feed on your blood without backup? Everything was supposed to go down tonight. It will still go as

planned.”

The vampires rushed forward. The room erupted into chaos. Werewolves shifted mid-stride, bones cracking and fur bursting through skin as our warriors transformed. Claws met fangs.

Growls thundered against the walls.

I barely had time to react before a vampire lunged at me. I ducked beneath his claws. He swung

again. I caught his wrist and drove my elbow into his throat.

He staggered. I twisted his arm behind his back and slammed him into the wall. Another one came

from my left.

Behind you! Lydia’s warning came just in time.

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Clas

I spun. My claws tore across the vampire's chest. He hissed and stumbled backward. Damon appeared beside me, his wolf fully visible beneath his skin. His eyes burned silver.

We fought back-to-back, moving almost as though we had trained together for years. Maybe that

was what the mate bond did.

Even when everything around us was chaos, I could sense Damon, his movements, his position, his

heartbeat, his anger.

Rhein's fury was also impossible to miss.

A vampire charged. I met him head-on. Our claws collided. Pain shot through my fingers. I gritted my teeth and pushed harder.

Then something changed. A strange sensation crawled across my skin. I froze for half a second.

Something was wrong.

I looked around. Viktor was gone.

My heart dropped. "Where is he?"

Damon immediately looked toward the spot where Viktor had been. "What?"

"Viktor. He is gone."

I scanned the battlefield. Nothing. No trace of him. The vampires were still attacking, but something about their movements suddenly made sense.

They weren't trying to kill us. They were distracting us. They were keeping us here. My stomach.

twisted.

“No.”

Damon grabbed my arm. “Aria?”

I stared toward the corridor. “He wasn’t trying to get me.”

A horrible realization slammed into me.

“He’s going after Elona.”

My blood turned to ice. I tore my arm from Damon’s grip.

“Aria, wait!”

I didn’t. I ran. I shoved past vampires and warriors alike, ignoring the claws that scraped my arms.

“Get out of my way!”

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ClaOT

A vampire tried to block me. I slammed into him with everything I had. He crashed into the wall

kept running.

Faster! Lydia screamed inside my head. Elona needs us!

“I’m going as fast as I can!”

The corridor blurred around me. I could hear Damon shouting behind me.

“Aria!”

But I couldn’t stop, not when every instinct in my body was screaming that my daughter was in

danger.

I reached Elona’s room. The door was open.

My heart stopped.

“Elona?”

There was no answer. I rushed inside. My feet froze. Ronan was lying on the floor. Joshua was beside him. For one terrible second, I couldn’t breathe.

“Dad!”

I dropped beside Ronan. His eyes were closed. There was blood near his temple.

“Joshua!”

I grabbed my brother’s shoulder. There was nothing. My gaze flew around the room. The blankets were scattered. The window was open. The room smelled of Viktor, and Elona was gone.

“No.” The word came out as a whisper. Then I screamed. “ELONA!”

She’s gone. Lydia’s voice trembled. They took her.

My chest tightened so violently it hurt. “No, no, no...”

I stumbled toward the open window. There, I could smell a faint scent of Viktor and Elona. My daughter’s scent was already fading. I didn’t think. I jumped through the window.

The impact barely registered. I landed, shifted, and sprinted. My body changed as I ran. Bones cracked, fur covered my skin, the world sharpened, and I became nothing but speed.

Don’t lose her. Lydia’s voice echoed through me. Don’t lose our pup.

I pushed harder. Branches whipped against my face. My paws tore through the earth. Ahead of me, movement flashed between the trees.

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“Viktor!” I growled and accelerated.

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Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 344

Arja's POV

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Viktor glanced over his shoulder. Even from a distance, I could see Elona in his arms. My daughter

was unconscious. My heart shattered.

“PUT HER DOWN!”

Viktor laughed. “You should have realized sooner.”

I ran faster. “ELONA!” She didn’t move. I could hear her heartbeat, but it was weak.

She’s alive, Lydia gasped.

Relief lasted only a second. Then Viktor reached the edge of the forest. Several vampires were waiting. A portal-like darkness shimmered behind them.

“No!”

I lunged, but I was too late. Viktor stepped backward into the darkness with Elona in his arms. The other vampires followed. I reached them just as the shadows closed. My claws struck empty air.

“ELONA!”

My scream tore through the forest.

I stumbled forward. “No...” My legs shook. I tried to run after them, but I didn’t know which direction to go. They had disappeared into the portal. Still, I decided to keep going in whichever direction my legs led me, but my body refused.

The battle had already drained me. My bloodline power had been pushed too far. I had fought Viktor. I had fought the vampires. I had shifted. I had chased them. Everything inside me was

burning.

Aria... Lydia's voice was faint. We need to stop.

"No." I forced one foot forward. Then another. "We can't stop."

We're exhausted.

"Elona needs me."

My knees buckled. I caught myself against a tree. My vision blurred.

"No..."

I pushed away from the trunk. I took one step, then another. The world began spinning. I could

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hear Damon somewhere behind me. Far away.

"Aria!"

I tried to answer, but nothing came out. My legs finally gave way. I hit the ground. The last thing

felt was Lydia curling protectively around my mind.

We'll find our pup.

Then everything went black.

Darkness swallowed me, not the peaceful kind. This darkness breathed. It pulsed around me like

something alive, something ancient that had been waiting for me to fall asleep.

I tried to move, but I couldn't. I tried to scream, but I had no voice.

Aria... Lydia's voice echoed faintly.

I'm here. Where are we?

She didn't answer. Then something changed. A warm golden light appeared in the distance. It flickered once, then expanded until it consumed the darkness.

I heard low, rhythmic voices. My heart began pounding.

I stepped forward. A massive altar appeared before me. Symbols were carved into its surface, glowing with a golden light that seemed to pulse with every heartbeat.

Then I saw her, my mother. I stopped breathing.

She stood before the altar, younger than I remembered her. Her hair fell over her shoulders, and her face was calm. Chains bound her wrists. Around her stood several people wearing dark

ceremonial robes. One of them raised his hands.

"The bloodline has awakened."

My mother's expression hardened. "What do you want from me?"

"The power must be awakened completely."

"At what price?"

The man hesitated.

My mother's eyes narrowed. "I asked you what the price is."

"The altar takes what it needs from you."

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A chill ran through me. My mother looked at the glowing symbols. "What happens if it takes too

much?"

"Then the bloodline bearer dies."

My heart cracked. "No." I stepped toward her. "Mom!"

She couldn't hear me. I reached for her. My hand passed straight-through her body. I stumbled

backward.

This isn't a dream, Lydia whispered. It's a memory.

Bloodline empathy. I was experiencing what my mother had experienced. I watched helplessly as

she placed her hand against the altar. The moment her palm touched the stone, the entire chamber shook.

Golden light exploded from the altar. My mother gasped. Her body jerked violently. Veins of golden energy spread beneath her skin.

"Stop!" she screamed.

The people around her didn't move.

"Stop this!"

The altar grew brighter. Her knees buckled. I could feel her pain. Not just see it. Every nerve in my body screamed as though the power were tearing through me. I clutched my chest.

Aria! Lydia cried out. Get out of here!

I can't!

The power wasn't touching my body. It was moving through my bloodline. Through my mother's

memories. Through me.

My mother fell to her knees. "I can't contain it!"

One of the robed figures stepped forward. "You must try."

"I'm dying! Please make it stop."

"The bloodline will survive," the man replied.

My mother's eyes filled with tears. "But I won't."

The altar suddenly released a wave of energy. My mother screamed. I screamed with her. Then I

heard a voice. It seemed to come from the altar itself.

The power belongs to the blood.

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I froze. The voice continued.

The blood carries the gift. The blood carries the curse. The bearer shall wield the power until the vessel breaks.

My mother's body trembled. "What are you?"

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Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 345

Aria's POV

The voice answered from the heart of the altar.

I am the source.

Golden energy exploded outward. My mother collapsed. I dropped to my knees beside her, even though I knew I wasn't really there.

"Mom!"

She looked straight at me. For one impossible second, I thought she could see me, but the light in her eyes was already fading. Blood ran from the corner of her mouth. The power recoiled, vicious

and final, and took her with it.

Everything shattered.

The altar. My mother's broken body. The golden light. All of it detonated into blackness.

I woke screaming.

"ELONA!"

I shot upright. Agony ripped through my chest like claws. My lungs seized. For several wild heartbeats, I didn't know where I was, only that my daughter was gone and the same force that

killed my mother was still inside me, coiling tighter.

A hand closed over my shoulder.

"Aria."

It was Damon's voice.

I blinked hard. The room swam into focus. Damon stood beside the bed, his eyes silver-rimmed with fear he was trying to crush. Ryder hovered near the window, his jaw locked. Noah held the doorway like a second wall, his arms crossed, his expression carved from stone.

My body felt hollowed out.

Breathe, Lydia urged, her voice tight. You're here, not there.

"Where's Elona?" The question tore out of me raw.

Damon's expression tightened. His hand slid down and closed around mine. "We're searching

everywhere. Trackers are in the forest, Noah's people are sweeping the neighboring territories,

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warriors are on every border, and Justin is coordinating with Ryder's contacts."

"We'll find her," Noah said, his voice firm and absolute.

My tears burned hot. "They took her. They took my pup."

Ryder's fists clenched. "I swear to you, we're using everything we have. We will find her."

It wasn't enough. Nothing felt like enough. I turned my face away, my throat closing.

Damon moved closer, the mate bond humming with his worry. "Aria..."

"I saw my mother."

The room went dead silent.

I swallowed. "I lived it. Through the bloodline. I was her on that altar. I saw what happened to her."

Damon's fingers tightened around mine. "What did you see?"

I closed my eyes. The golden light flared behind my lids. My mother's screams. The pressure that

cracked her from the inside.

"The altar's power isn't a gift." My voice shook. "It's a curse. My mother didn't die because she was weak. The power killed her."

Damon's face drained of color. "What are you saying?"

I met his eyes. "The same thing is happening to me."

"No."

"Damon..."

"No." The word cracked like a whip. Rhein's growl bled into his voice. "You don't know that."

"I do." I pressed a trembling hand to my chest, where the power still pulsed, hungry.

"Every time I reach for the bloodline, it takes something. It's growing stronger and hungrier. Just like it did with

her."

Damon shook his head hard. "We'll find a way to stop it."

"That's right," Noah said quietly. "We will."

"There may not be a way." The words tasted like ash.

"There is always a way." Damon's voice broke on the edge of desperation. "I am not going to sit here and accept that you're going to die."

My eyes filled with tears. "I don't want to die either." The words came out barely above a whisper.

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But I think I finally understand why Viktor took Elona."

Damon went completely still. The temperature in the room seemed to drop.

I looked at each of them in turn. "He's waiting for me to die."

Ryder frowned. "Why?"

"Because the bloodline doesn't end with me."

Noah's eyes hardened. "It passes to the next generation."

I nodded once. "To Elona."

Silence crushed the air from the room.

Damon stared at me. "No." His head moved in a slow, violent shake. "No. He cannot use our

daughter."

"He doesn't need to use her now." I wiped at my face with the back of my hand. "He's waiting. Once the backlash kills me, the power will transfer directly to her. Then he takes it from Elona..."

My voice fractured. "And she dies the same way my mother did. The same way I will."

Noah's expression turned lethal. "And Viktor walks away with everything."

I nodded, shaking. "He knows what the bloodline can do. He knows what it did to my mother. He knows what's already happening inside me. If he just waits..."

A sob tore free.

Damon hauled me against his chest. I buried my face in the curve of his neck, breathing him in. His arm tightened around me.

"We won't let that happen," he growled against my hair.

Our pup... Lydia's whimper cracked through my mind, raw with terror and fury.

I clenched my fists in Damon's shirt. We can't let her suffer the same fate.

Determination burned through the fear, sharp and clean.

I lifted my head. "We have to find her."

Damon's eyes blazed pure silver. Rhein's presence slammed against the bond, fierce and unyielding.

"We will."

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Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 346

Aria's POV

The altar ruins looked nothing like they had in my dream. In the dream, the place had been alive,

Golden light had flowed through the ancient markings, and the air had vibrated with a power so immense that even Lydia had been frightened. Now, everything was silent.

I stood at the center of it all, staring at the altar. The place where my mother had died. The stones

answered. A low vibration climbed through the soles of my feet, up my legs, into the hollow place

behind my ribs where the bloodline lived.

Golden threads of energy stirred beneath the surface, restless and hungry. I raised my hands the

way my mother had raised hers in the vision and spoke the words that had never been meant for

living tongues.

The ritual locked into place.

Power slammed upward. For one blinding second, I was the altar. I saw its memory, its hunger, its

ancient purpose.

Visions tore through me: I saw vampire courts raising black banners, packs falling one after

another, wolfkind driven to the edge of extinction. If the vampires ever claimed this power fully, they would not stop at dominance. They would erase us.

The truth settled like ice in my veins.

If I release my power, I thought, my heart hammering, I become the sacrifice.

The altar would drain me dry. My body, my wolf, everything that made me Aria would be pulled into

the stone and bound there forever.

The power would wake the source consciousness of wolfkind and flood the werewolves with

strength they had not known in centuries.

But there was a price.

My mother's house, its bloodline. Once the source woke, every strengthened wolf would feel the pull of this lineage. Control would settle into the veins of whoever carried the blood. Into me... or into Elona after me.

Lydia's voice cut through the roar of energy. We would rule every one of them.

I staggered, gasping, and forced the power back down. The golden light guttered and died. My knees hit stone. Sweat cooled on my skin in the night wind.

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Just then, footsteps approached, many of them.

lifted my head.

Charl

Representatives from the major packs stood at the edge of the ruins, moonlight catching on their eyes. Alphas. Council members. Damon, Noah, and Ryder were among them.

An older Alpha from the Northern packs stepped forward first. His voice carried the weight of command. "Alpha Aria, we convened the Werewolf Council. After consulting several seers, we confirmed what will happen if the vampires claim the power of this altar."

A woman with iron-gray hair spoke next. "The vampires cannot have this power. If they claim it,

wolfkind ends."

Another voice, colder, spoke. "The only way to keep it from them is to wake the source ourselves, and the bloodline is the key."

I pushed to my feet, swaying. Damon moved instantly to my side, his hand steadying my elbow. Through the mate bond, I felt his fury and his fear braided tight.

"You want me to finish the ritual," I said.

Silence answered. Then reluctant, resolute nods.

The eldest Council member's gaze met mine. There was no softness left in it. "If the power is released through you, the source wakes. Every pack grows stronger. The vampires lose their

chance."

"And I become part of the altar," I finished for him. "Drained, bound, and gone."

The Northern Alpha did not look away. "Yes. A necessary sacrifice for the greater good."

Lydia snarled inside me. They ask us to die for them.

They ask us to save them, I answered, though the words tasted like blood.

Damon's voice cut across the circle, sharp as a blade. "There has to be another way."

The Alpha of the Ashfang Pack stepped closer. "There is one more truth we all understand." His gaze flicked briefly to Damon, then back to me. "Once the bloodline is spent... the next vessel is the child. Elona."

My wolf surged, protective and vicious. They want us to give her up. To accept that she becomes the next key.

Damon's growl rolled out low and lethal. Rhein's presence slammed against every dominant wolf present. "Choose your next words with care."

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The representatives did not retreat.

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“We are not asking you to leave the child with the vampires,” the Northern Alpha said. “We are asking you to make the sacrifice now, while the power is still yours to control. Wake the source. Strengthen the packs. Keep the altar out of enemy hands. And accept that the bloodline’s burden...

ends with you.”

Ends with me.

Meaning Elona would be free of it, or meaning they were willing to write her off the moment I was

gone.

I looked at the ring of faces, wolves who had traveled through the night because the altar’s danger had finally become impossible to ignore.

They needed me to die cleanly. They needed the power released on our terms, and somewhere beneath the strategy and the fear, they needed me to stop fighting for a daughter they had already begun to consider collateral.

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Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 347

Aria’s POV

Clau

Damon’s hand tightened on my arm. Through the bond, I felt the silent promise: We do not give her up. Ever.

Lydia's voice was a blade. Tell them.

I drew a slow breath. The fracture in my chest still ached, but my voice came out steady.

"If I give myself up here, the power will activate, and the vampires will never harness it for themselves." I met every pair of eyes in turn. "What happens to my daughter then?"

The eldest Council member answered without hesitation. "We will rescue her from the vampires

and take care of her."

Lydia snarled. By "take care of her," they mean kill her.

I knew that too well. I knew exactly what they were capable of when the "greater good" demanded

My hands curled into fists. My mother had died because of this power. I refused to let Elona suffer

the same fate.

"No." The word cut through the silence like a claw. "I won't allow that."

The older Alpha frowned. "Aria..."

"I will never let my daughter be sacrificed." My voice grew stronger with every syllable. "I don't care what the altar demands. I don't care what the vampires want. And I don't care how powerful this

bloodline becomes."

I looked at every Alpha and representative gathered around the ruins. "Nobody is taking my daughter's life."

Our pup, Lydia growled inside me, fierce and absolute.

"I'm going after her. I'm going into vampire territory."

The entire gathering erupted.

"No!"

"That's suicide!"

"You'll be captured the moment you cross the border!"

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I didn't move.

The eldest Council member stepped toward me, his expression hardening. "If you enter their territory, they will sense your bloodline."

"Let them."

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"You're not understanding. Viktor already knows what your blood can do. If he captures you, he'll have direct access to the power. Once they have you, they can force you to awaken the altar."

"I know."

"Then why are you talking about walking into their territory?"

I stared at him. "Because my daughter is there." My voice cracked. "She's alone."

Damon's expression changed. His eyes glowed pure silver. Rhein was close to the surface. Our pup

is alone.

Lydia answered immediately. We need to go. We need to save her.

I took a breath. "I am not asking permission. I'm going to get Elona."

Their eyes widened.

Damon's hand closed around my wrist. "You're not going alone. I'm going with you."

I looked at him. "You don't know what you're saying."

"I know exactly what I'm saying." His grip tightened. "If you're going into vampire territory, I'm going with you."

"Damon..."

"No." His voice was firm, final. "You are my mate." The mate bond pulsed between us, hot and unbreakable. "And Elona is our daughter. We bring her home together."

I stared at him. For a moment, I couldn't speak.

Then another voice came from behind him.

“He’s right, Aria.” Ryder stepped forward. “I’ll go too. I’m Elona’s uncle.”

Several representatives exchanged worried looks.

Noah followed, his voice calm and lethal. “So will I.”

The older Alpha shook his head. “This is madness.”

Noah’s expression was cold. “Maybe.” He looked toward the dark line of the forest. “But hiding

Q

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Your prize awaits!

Task [Unlock 35 more chapters) is done! Go grab your reward

Nobody answered.

Noah continued. “Every few weeks, they test our defenses. They attack borders. They kill wolves. They manipulate our people.” His eyes narrowed. “And every time, we push them back and pretend the problem is solved.”

Ryder nodded once. “Until they attack again.”

Damon stepped beside me, his presence expanding until it filled the ruins. “This has gone on long enough. We can keep defending ourselves...” His voice carried to every ear. “Or we can end this.

A murmur passed through the gathered wolves. One representative shook his head. “You’re proposing war.”

Damon’s eyes flashed silver. “I’m proposing an end to fear.”

The words settled over everyone like falling ash.

Noah stepped forward again. “How long are we going to live like this?” He gestured toward the surrounding forest. “How many more borders will we have to reinforce? How many pups will we have to hide every time vampire scouts are spotted?”

Ryder’s expression hardened. “How many more mothers will have to bury their children?”

Damon's voice was calm, absolute. "Unless we settle this with the vampires once and for all, wolfkind will live forever in the fear of being invaded. We will keep watching our people look over their shoulders for the next attack. That ends now."

His hand found the small of my back, steady and certain. Through the bond, I felt Rhein's agreement, fierce and unyielding. We hunt. We end it.

Lydia's voice was a low, savage growl in my mind. They fear the vampires more than they value our daughter. But Damon, Noah, and Ryder stand with us. That is enough.

I looked at the representatives, wolves who had come to demand my sacrifice and now stared at the united front we had become.

"We are not asking for permission," I said. "We are telling you what will happen. Elona comes home. And if the vampires stand in the way, then we burn their ground to ash until there is nothing left for them to invade with."

Silence answered.

Damon's silver eyes met mine, full of the same fire. Ryder's jaw flexed once in grim approval. Noah's gaze was already calculating routes, numbers, blood.

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The decision had been made.

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Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 348

Axia's POV

A vampire representative arrived at the Grayson Pack just before sunset, while Damon, Ryder,

Noah, and I were preparing to leave for our mission into vampire territory.

He didn't come with an army. He didn't come bearing threats of war. He simply crossed the

boundary between our territories as though he had every right to be there.

Gla

He wore a black coat that fell to his knees, his pale face completely expressionless. The wolves surrounding him growled, their bodies tense and ready to attack, but he didn't even blink.

"I bring a message from Duke Viktor."

My claws slid out. "Then speak."

The vampire's eyes settled on me. "He hopes you will accept his invitation."

My stomach twisted. "An invitation?"

"He would like you to come to vampire territory alone."

Damon stepped forward at once. "She's not going anywhere."

"Like hell she is!" Noah snapped.

"Go back and tell him that," Ryder added.

The vampire looked at each of them in turn. "That is not for any of you to decide."

Damon's eyes flashed silver. He was about to speak when I touched his arm. "Please. Let me

handle this."

His gaze snapped to mine. "Aria."

"I need to go."

"No." The word came instantly.

I met his eyes. “If I don’t, Viktor will find another way to hurt Elona.”

Damon’s jaw clenched. “Then we’re going together. We agreed we would get her back together.”

“We did.” I squeezed his hand. “But this invitation was meant for me.”

Rhein growled through the bond. I don’t like this.

Neither do I.

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Then don’t go.

Claun

Hooked at Damon. “If all of us enter their territory, they’ll see it as an invasion. If I go alone, they’ll

believe I’m coming willingly.”

Damon stared at me for several long seconds. “I hate this plan.”

“I hate it too,” Ryder said, “but I understand. If we act rashly, Viktor might harm Elona.”

“I hate it even more because you’re right,” Damon muttered.

I gave them a faint smile.

“Come back safe, Aria,” Noah said. “We’ll be waiting.”

My throat tightened. “I will.”

I turned to Damon. The worry on his face cut deeper than any wound. “Don’t worry about me. I’ll be

back.”

His eyes burned pure silver. “You had better. Because if anything happens to you, I will storm into vampire territory and destroy everything that breathes there.”

I smiled despite the fear twisting inside me. “I’ll come home with Elona.”

He nodded once.

Then I walked away, alone.

The journey into vampire territory was unnaturally quiet. The deeper I went, the colder the air became. The forest changed. The trees grew darker and denser, as if the light itself had been

driven out.

Even Lydia seemed uneasy. I can smell them. There are so many of them.

I kept walking.

Eventually, the trees opened into a massive stone courtyard. Beyond it rose a castle of black stone, its towers reaching toward the sky, its windows glowing faintly red. I stopped.

Viktor was waiting at the entrance.

He looked different. An elegant black suit sat beneath a long dark coat. A silver crest rested against his chest. His posture was regal, his eyes a deep, steady crimson.

He smiled. "Aria. You came." He bowed slightly. "I'm pleased you accepted my invitation."

I stared at him. "Where is my daughter?"

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<Chapter 348

His smile didn't falter. "Straight to the point, I see."

"Where is Elona?" I asked again.

"She's safe."

"I want to see her. Now."

He chuckled softly. "You haven't changed."

I narrowed my eyes. "And you still haven't answered my question."

"Your daughter is being treated well."

My hands curled into fists. “If you’ve hurt her...”

Clair

“I haven’t.” His expression shifted, almost offended. “I told you. I have no desire to harm either of

you.”

I studied him. The presence I’d felt before was still there, but his aura felt controlled now.

He was no longer pretending to be a vampire disguised as a Beta. He was simply himself: a vampire duke. And somehow, that made him more frightening.

“Come inside,” he said.

“I’m not here to socialize.”

“You’ve traveled a considerable distance.” He gestured toward the castle. “At least allow me to offer you dinner.”

“I want Elona.”

His smile returned, calm and unyielding. “You’ll see her... only after.”

My instincts screamed at me to refuse. But I needed to see my daughter. I stepped inside. The doors closed behind me.

The castle smelled of stone, smoke, and blood. My stomach turned. Then a completely different sensation hit me. A sudden, sharp hunger. I stopped walking.

Lydia growled. Aria.

I pressed a hand against my stomach. What is happening?

M

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 349

Axia’s POV

I swallowed. The scent of blood hung thick in the air.

A long table had been prepared in the dining hall. At its center sat several plates of raw bloody

meat. My stomach growled again. My mouth watered.

Claim

The vampire bloodline I carried stirred with greedy recognition. I clenched my hands in my lap until my nails bit into my flesh, forcing myself not to reach for it.

I stared at the food. Viktor pulled out a chair.

“Please. Sit.”

I sat slowly. He took the seat opposite me.

Viktor watched me over the rim of his goblet, amused. “You feel it, don’t you? The call in your

blood. Go ahead, eat.”

I lifted my gaze and held his. “I came for Elona, nothing else.”

He set the goblet down with a soft click. “I am very fond of you both. You must believe that. I have no desire to harm either of you.”

His voice softened, almost gentle. “All I ask is one simple thing. Agree to be turned fully. Become a vampire in body and soul, as your blood already half-remembers. Do that... and everything else becomes negotiable.”

I stared at him across the table. He wanted me to become a vampire... not just me, but Elona too.

He wanted both of us.

“Why would I ever agree to that?”

“Think about it,” Viktor said, spreading his hands. “Vampires and werewolves have fought for centuries. Blood has been spilled on both sides. But you and your daughter could change that.”

I said nothing.

He leaned forward. “You possess the bloodline power. I possess the strength and knowledge of

the vampires. Together, we could rule both species.”

“Rule?”

“Guide,” he corrected smoothly.

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Clair

I almost laughed. There was nothing peaceful about a vampire who wanted to rule every werewolf

alive.

Viktor continued, his crimson eyes gleaming. “No more borders. No more wars. No more packs attacking vampire territories. No more vampires hunting wolves.”

“You expect me to believe that?”

“I expect you to understand, Aria.”

I looked at him. I understood perfectly. He didn’t want peace. He wanted control. If he obtained the altar’s power through me and Elona, he would have enough strength to dominate wolfkind.

He’s lying, Lydia’s voice was cold.

I know.

Viktor watched me closely. I forced myself to relax.

“What happens if I refuse?”

His expression didn’t change. “Then we return to the old ways.” His eyes hardened. “And Elona

remains here with me.”

My heart twisted. I couldn’t risk provoking him, not while my daughter was in his hands. I lowered

my gaze.

“All right.”

Viktor went still. “All right?”

I nodded. “I’ll become a vampire.”

Lydia fell silent in shock. Then she snarled. Aria! This is madness.

It’s the only way to get close to Elona.

Viktor looked almost stunned. Then he beamed. “In that case... go ahead and dig into your food.”

He watched me. This was clearly a test, one I had to pass. I picked up a piece of raw meat. The smell hit me immediately. My vampire blood surged. My fangs ached. I hated how much I wanted it. But I forced myself to eat.

Viktor observed carefully. I chewed and swallowed, then reached for another piece. His smile

widened.

“Excellent. You’re finally accepting what you are.”

I kept my expression neutral and continued eating.

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<Chapter 349

Inside, Lydia growled. We are not becoming one of them.

This is the only way to survive.

The more I ate, the more Viktor’s satisfaction grew.

He stood. “Bring her in.”

My heart stopped.

Clair

A few moments later, the doors opened. Two vampires walked in, and between them was Elona.

My breath caught. “Elona.”

My daughter looked frightened. Her little face was pale, but there were no wounds, no blood, no bruises. She was alive and unharmed.

Relief crashed through me so violently that my knees nearly buckled.

Our pup, Lydia’s voice trembled. She’s safe.

Elona’s eyes found mine. “Mommy.”

I almost ran to her. I took one step, but Viktor raised his hand.

“Not yet.”

I stopped. My blood boiled. “She’s my daughter. I can’t even go to her? Touch her?”

“You will have plenty of time to reunite with her.” He stepped between us. “But that will be after the

Embrace.”

I clenched my jaw. “What do you mean?”

Viktor’s voice remained calm. “You must first prove that you are willing to become a vampire.”

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Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 350

Axia’s POV

Elona’s lower lip trembled. “Mommy...”

My heart broke. I wanted to tear Viktor apart. I wanted to shift and rip through every vampire in

this castle. But Elona needed me alive. I forced myself to smile at her.

“It’s okay, sweetheart.”

Her eyes filled with tears. “Are you coming to get me?”

“Yes.” I looked directly at Viktor. “I’m coming for you.”

He smiled. “After the Embrace.”

I nodded. “Fine.”

Viktor walked toward the table. Then he drew one of his claws across his wrist. Blood immediately welled from the wound. The scent hit me. My entire body reacted. My fangs descended. My pulse

thundered.

Viktor poured his blood into a silver cup. The dark red liquid seemed almost black beneath the

candlelight. He held it out to me.

“Drink it.”

I stared at the cup. “Will this complete the transformation?”

“Yes, it will. Once you drink it, there’s no going back. You will become a vampire.”

I looked at Elona. She was watching me. She looked afraid. I could feel my heart breaking.

Viktor smiled. “Drink, Aria.”

I reached for the cup. My fingers closed around it. The blood inside moved slightly, almost as

though it were alive. I lifted it toward my lips.

Lydia’s voice became urgent. Aria, don’t.

I stared at Elona, then at Viktor, then at the blood.

I brought the cup closer and drank the contents.

For one heartbeat, nothing happened. Then everything did. Pain exploded through my body. I dropped the empty cup. It shattered against the floor.

My back arched as something seared through my veins. It wasn't fire. Fire would have been easier.

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Clair

This was something stronger. Something was changing inside me. My heart hammered, then its rhythm became uneven.

My knees gave out. I crashed onto the floor.

"Mommy!" Elona screamed. I turned my head toward her.

"Stay..." My voice broke. "Stay where you are."

Viktor's expression was one of pure satisfaction. "Beautiful."

I wanted to kill him. I wanted to rip his throat out. But my body wasn't listening to me. My skin turned ice-cold. My fingers curled against the floor.

My entire body convulsed. Something inside my chest snapped. My heartbeat stopped. There was absolute silence. I froze. Then another slow beat came.

My eyes flew open. The world changed. I could hear everything. Every heartbeat in the room. Every breath. Every movement. The vampires standing by the door. Elona's frightened pulse. Viktor's steady heartbeat.

I could even hear the blood moving through their veins. The scent nearly overwhelmed me. My fangs descended. I touched my lips.

My reflection in the broken cup stared back at me. My eyes were crimson.

Viktor stood. His face lit with triumph. "You did it." He looked at me. "You've become a vampire." He laughed softly. "Welcome, Aria."

He stepped toward me and opened his arms. I wanted to shove him away. Instead, I forced myself

to let him embrace me.

“Congratulations,” he whispered. His words made my stomach turn. “You are finally one of us.”

Viktor released me. His eyes gleamed with satisfaction. Then he turned toward Elona.

“Now it’s her turn.”

My heart stopped. “No.”

Viktor looked at me. “She must also go through the transition.”

He walked toward my daughter. I moved between them.

“She’s too young.”

He frowned. “Her blood will adapt.”

“You don’t know that.” I spread my arms. “She’s a child. I can’t let her go through that now.”

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Viktor’s eyes narrowed. For a moment, the room became dangerously quiet.

“It has to be done, Aria. This is not up for debate.”

I softened my voice. “If she must be turned, let me do it.”

Viktor studied me. “You?”

“I’m her mother.” I glanced at Elona. “She’ll be terrified if someone else does it.”

Viktor considered my words. “And you believe you can handle it?”

“I just survived it.” I held his gaze. “If you force her through the Embrace now, she’ll fight you. She’ll

panic. You could lose control.”

That made him pause. I continued. “Let me prepare her.”

Viktor's expression remained suspicious. But his ambition won. He wanted the bloodline intact. He wanted Elona transformed. Most importantly, he believed I was completely under his control.

Finally, he nodded. "Fine."

Relief almost made my knees weak.

"But don't disappoint me, Aria."

I lowered my head. "I won't."

He turned toward the vampires. "Prepare the carriage."

I frowned. "Why?"

"You have another task." He gestured toward the door. "We are going to the altar."

My blood ran cold. "You want me to release its power?"

"Exactly." He smiled. "Now that you are a vampire, there is no reason to fear that you'll betray me."

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