

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 401

Aria's POV

"I accused you for a good reason. You've been hiding things from me!" Damon snapped.

"Don't you think that maybe there's a reason I've been hiding them?"

His eyes narrowed. "Then tell me."

"No."

The answer came immediately.

His jaw clenched. "Aria."

"I said no."

+25 Paints

For a heartbeat, we simply stared at each other. The anger between us had become almost tangible, filling the room with a pressure that even our wolves could feel.

Then Damon closed the remaining distance. I should have stepped back. Instead, I stood my ground.

His hands caught my waist and pulled me closer. I didn't push him away. The anger between us collided with the mate bond, turning every emotion sharper. His forehead came to rest against mine.

"Tell me to let you go."

I stared into his eyes.

I could feel his restraint. His anger. His uncertainty. And beneath all of it, the fear that he might actually

lose me.

I could feel my own anger burning just as fiercely.

"I don't want you to."

His eyes searched mine for another second, as if making sure I meant it.

Then he kissed me.

It wasn't gentle. It wasn't supposed to be.

It was all the frustration we'd been swallowing, every accusation, every unanswered question, every fear neither of us wanted to admit. The mate bond surged between us, wrapping around the collision of our emotions until I could barely tell where his anger ended and mine began.

I kissed him back.

My fingers curled into his shirt as his arms tightened around me, and for one suspended moment, neither of us seemed willing to remember what had started the argument in the first place.

Finally. Lydia gave a low, almost amused growl. You two have been circling each other for ten minutes.

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Lignored her.

Damon's hands found my waist, then my hips, pulling me flush against him as if the confrontation downstairs had only sharpened the edge of whatever this was between us.

My fingers tangled in his shirt, yanking it free from his waistband. The mate bond thrummed under my skin, hot and insistent, drowning out everything else.

Yes, Lydia purred in the back of my mind, her voice thick with approval. Satisfy him. He's ours.

I didn't answer her. I didn't need to. Damon's tongue swept against mine, and I opened for him, tasting the faint spice of whiskey and the deeper, darker flavor that was purely him.

His low growl vibrated against my lips as he lifted me, carrying me the few steps to the bed without breaking the kiss. My back hit the mattress. He followed, bracing himself above me, his eyes gone silver with Rhein's presence.

"Aria." My name was rough in his throat. "If you want me to stop..."

"Don't you dare."

I pulled him down. The weight of him settled between my thighs, solid and warm, and the bond flared so brightly I could barely breathe. His mouth trailed down my throat, teeth grazing the sensitive spot where a mark would go. My claws pricked at the sheets.

Lydia was pacing now, restless, eager.

Then it hit me. A sweet scent.

I froze.

Damon's lips paused against my collarbone. "What's wrong?"

I didn't answer. My head turned sharply toward the side of his neck. There was no wound. No broken skin, nothing. But the smell of blood clung to him like perfume, rich and coppery and impossibly strong.

No... Lydia's voice cracked, sharp with fury and fear. Push it down, now. It's waking again. It's trying to take

more of us...

My stomach turned. I shoved at Damon's chest hard enough that he rocked back, eyes wide with shock.

"Aria...?"

I scrambled out from under him, my heart slamming against my ribs. The scent followed, thicker now that I was looking for it. It coated the air, coated him.

"You're bleeding," I said, my voice too sharp. "I can smell it."

Damon frowned, his hand rising to the side of his neck where my gaze had locked. "I'm not. Look." He tilted his head, showing me smooth, unbroken skin. "There's nothing there."

But the scent didn't lie. It was his blood.

Damon's expression shifted from confusion to something colder. He sat back on his heels, his shirt still half-open, his chest rising and falling too fast. "You're pushing me away."

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That's not...

“You shoved me off like I burned you.” His voice dropped, Alpha authority bleeding through even when he tried to keep it quiet. After everything. After what we just...” He cut himself off, his jaw tight. “Is this some kind of rejection?”

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Axia's POV

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“I’m not rejecting you.” The words came out too fast, too defensive. My pulse was still racing from

the bond, from the nearness of him, from the impossible scent that refused to fade.

“Something’s wrong. I can smell your blood even though you’re not bleeding.”

He stared at me for a long second. Then he laughed once. It was short and humorless.

“Convenient timing.”

“Damon...”

He stood. The mattress dipped and released as his weight left it. He dragged a hand through his

hair, his silver eyes flashing once before the human color returned.

“You don’t have to invent excuses, Aria. If you don’t want this, if you don’t want me, just say so.”

“That’s not what this is,”

He didn’t seem to hear me. Or maybe he didn’t want to. He grabbed his discarded jacket from the chair, his movements sharp and controlled in a way that only made the fury underneath more

obvious.

“Damon, wait.”

He paused at the door, his back to me. For a heartbeat, I thought he might turn around. I thought he might ask again and let me explain what happened.

Instead, he spoke without looking at me.

“Don’t bother.”

The door slammed hard enough to rattle the frame.

I sat alone in the room, staring at the closed door. My body felt exhausted, but my mind refused to quiet down.

I could still smell Damon. Even now, with him gone, the scent of his blood lingered in my senses. My stomach twisted.

I pressed my palms against my face and took a slow breath. What had almost happened? I had felt it. That terrifying pull inside me. For one brief moment, the scent of Damon’s blood had overwhelmed everything else.

My instincts had surged forward so violently that I had barely recognized myself. I had come

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within a hair of losing control. And if I had? I didn’t want to imagine it.

Lydia stirred uneasily. You stopped.

Barely. I lowered my hands. What if next time I don’t?

She was silent for a moment. Then we will fight harder.

I closed my eyes. That wasn’t enough. Not anymore. Because this wasn’t just about me. It was

Damon. It was Elona. It was my father. It was everyone I loved. The people I had spent so long

fighting to protect could become the very people I hurt.

I couldn’t allow that. I couldn’t live with myself if I ever looked into Elona’s eyes and saw fear

because of something I had done.

My throat tightened. Elona. I missed her so badly it hurt. It had been too long since I'd simply been

her mother. Too long since I'd watched her laugh over something silly, tucked her into bed, or

woken to find her curled against me.

I remembered the old days. The quiet mornings. Her little arms around my neck. The way she'd

call for me whenever she woke from a nightmare.

Those memories felt impossibly precious now. I wanted them back. I wanted my family back. I

wanted to walk into a room without wondering whether my own instincts might turn against the

people I loved.

And more than anything, I wanted Damon. My mate. The man I loved. The thought of him leaving

the room in anger made my chest ache. I hadn't rejected him. I never could.

But how could I explain that pushing him away had been the only thing I could think of when his

blood suddenly smelled so intoxicating? How could I tell him that I was terrified of what I might do

to him?

I stared at the door. "I'm sorry, Damon." The words disappeared into the empty room.

Lydia nudged against my consciousness. You love him.

I swallowed. "More than anything."

Then we must fight this.

I opened my eyes. The fear was still there. But beneath it, determination was beginning to form.

I thought about the witch. Her words echoed through my mind. There was a way to remove the vampire bloodline. A real way. She had confirmed it. That was enough.

I didn't care how difficult it was. I didn't care how many people refused to help me. I didn't care

how far I had to go. I would find a way.

Hooked down at my hands. "I'll get rid of it."

Lydia's presence strengthened. Yes. Let's do that.

I don't care what it costs. I will pay the price.

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I took a deep breath. The vampire bloodline had already taken too much from me. It had taken my

peace. It had put distance between me and my family. It had made me fear my own mate. I

refused to let it take anything else.

I stood slowly. My legs felt weak, but I forced myself upright. I would search every territory, every healer, every ancient record, every person who knew anything about vampire bloodlines.

Somewhere, there is an answer, and I will find it. Whatever the cost, I will rid myself of this curse.

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Aria's POV

The next day, I was in my room when I heard voices outside. One of them was Damon's. The

moment I heard the other, my heart dropped. Noah.

I rushed out of my room. Damon's anger hit me before I even saw him. His Alpha aura had spread through the hallway, heavy enough to make the wolves nearby shift uneasily. He had intercepted Noah on his way to my room.

Noah stood near the far wall, one hand pressed against his left arm. The wound he'd received from

the witch the day before had barely begun to heal, and fresh blood had soaked through his bandage.

Damon stood several feet in front of him. His knuckles were bruised, and my stomach dropped at the sight.

"What happened?"

Neither of them answered.

I moved closer. "Noah?"

He lifted his eyes to me. There was a split across his lower lip, and his breathing was uneven. "I'm

fine."

I looked at Damon. His expression was hard, his eyes cold. "Ask him."

My eyes narrowed. "What did you do?"

Damon's jaw tightened. "All I did was ask him a question, which he refused to answer."

I looked between them. "What question?"

Damon's gaze remained fixed on me. "I only asked him what the two of you have been doing

together."

My chest tightened. So this was about that.

Noah let out a humourless laugh. "I told him nothing."

Damon's eyes flashed. "Because you think you're protecting her?"

“I’m protecting her from you.”

The hallway went completely still. Damon’s Alpha aura intensified. He took one step towards

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Noah. “Choose your next words carefully.”

Noah didn’t move. “You want the truth?”

“I’ve been asking for it.”

“The truth is that you don’t understand her.”

Damon’s fists clenched. Noah continued, his voice hardening. “You think because she’s your mate,

she belongs to you. You think that gives you the right to demand every answer from her.”

“You have no right to interfere in our relationship.”

“I have every right to interfere when I watch you hurt her.”

My breath caught. “Damon...”

He didn’t look at me.

Noah’s expression hardened. “You aren’t worthy of her.”

That was the last thing Damon needed to hear.

He moved so quickly that I barely registered it. His fist struck Noah across the face, sending him stumbling backwards.

“Damon!”

Noah recovered and swung back, but his injured arm slowed him. Damon blocked the blow and

drove him backwards. The sound of their bodies colliding with the floor echoed through the

hallway.

“Stop!”

They didn't listen. Damon's wolf surged forward. I could feel Rhein's Alpha presence rolling through

the room, powerful and furious. Noah's own wolf answered with a low growl, but Noah was already

at a disadvantage. His injured arm made it difficult for him to defend himself properly.

Damon struck him again.

Noah stumbled, blood appearing at the corner of his mouth. My heart pounded violently.

I ran forward just as Damon raised his fist again. I stepped between them.

"Damon, enough!"

His fist stopped inches from me. His eyes were burning with rage. "Move."

"No. I won't."

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His expression darkened. "Aria."

turned slightly and saw Noah behind me. He could barely stand. His breathing was ragged, and his injured arm hung uselessly at his side.

Anger surged through me.

I faced Damon again. "You could have seriously hurt him."

"He deserved it." His voice was cold. "That's what he gets for speaking to me the way he did and

for refusing to tell me what the two of you have been doing."

"That isn't your concern."

"I'm your mate, Aria!" His voice echoed through the hallway. "How long will you continue keeping

things from me and running to Noah instead?"

My chest tightened. “Maybe when you stop acting like you know what’s best for me.”

Silence fell.

My words seemed to hang between us.

Damon stared at me, and for a brief second, I saw the pain behind his anger. Then his expression hardened again.

“So that’s where we are.”

My stomach tightened. “What do you mean?”

“I don’t know what’s best for you, but Noah does?” His eyes flicked towards Noah before returning

to me. “Does he matter that much to you?”

“Don’t twist my words.”

“Then tell me the truth.”

He stepped closer. I held my ground, even though every instinct in me screamed to look away.

“What is going on between you and Noah?”

I couldn’t answer.

I couldn’t tell Damon that Noah and I had gone to see a witch. Not when I didn’t even know what

the witch’s warning meant yet. Not when telling him could put everything at risk.

Damon watched my silence, and something in his expression changed.

“You still won’t tell me.”

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“Damon...”

“Then answer one question.”

His voice dropped, and the entire hallway seemed to hold its breath.

His eyes locked onto mine. “Is it Noah?”

My heart stopped.

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Damon’s jaw tightened as he stared at me, waiting for an answer that I couldn’t give. Or is it me?”

His voice was barely above a whisper, but the words cut deeper than his earlier anger.

“Choose.”

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 404

Aria’s POV

I stared at Damon, my heart pounding beneath my ribs as the weight of everything I had been

hiding settled heavily between us.

I stepped closer to him. “Damon, you’re the one I chose.”

His jaw tightened, but he didn’t look away.

“I chose you,” I repeated, forcing myself to hold his gaze. “Not Noah. I never wanted you to

think otherwise.”

Something flickered in his eyes, but it wasn’t enough to ease the tension radiating from him.

“If that’s true,” he said quietly, “then why are you still keeping things from me?”

My stomach twisted. “Damon...”

“No.” His voice hardened. “You don’t get to tell me you chose me while continuing to keep secrets from me.”

His Alpha aura rolled through the room, heavy and oppressive. I could almost feel it pressing

against my skin.

Lydia stirred uneasily inside me. He's hurt.

I know.

Damon took a step toward me, his eyes never leaving mine. "Where did you and Noah go?"

I looked away. I had known this moment would come eventually. I had simply hoped I could

delay it long enough to find a solution on my own.

But Damon was my mate. The man I had chosen. The father of my pup. If I truly wanted a future with him, I couldn't keep building that future on secrets.

I drew in a slow breath. "We went to see a witch."

His expression changed immediately. "A witch?"

I nodded. "Her name is Mara. We found out she may be able to cure me of the vampire bloodline."

Silence fell between us.

I forced myself to continue. I told Damon where Mara lived, how Noah and I had entered the

forbidden zone to find her, and what she had told us about the ritual that could potentially strip the vampire bloodline from my body.

By the time I finished, Damon was staring at me as though he was still trying to process everything.

"You went into the forbidden zone," he said slowly, "to find a witch who could remove the vampire bloodline?"

“Yes.”

His eyes narrowed. “With Noah.”

I sighed. “I didn’t have a choice.”

His eyes flashed. “You always have a choice, Aria.”

I flinched.

Damon dragged a hand through his hair, his frustration rolling off him in waves. “Do you have

any idea what went through my mind yesterday when I found out you were gone? I thought

something had happened to you.”

“I’m sorry.”

“Sorry doesn’t change the fact that you put yourself in danger.”

He stepped closer, and for a brief moment, the anger in his expression faded.

“I’m afraid of losing you, Aria.”

Those words struck me harder than his anger ever could. My chest tightened.

Damon looked away, his jaw clenched.

“I’ve already come too close to losing you too many times,” he continued. “I can’t let that happen again.”

I swallowed hard. There was fear in his voice, and that hurt.

Damon’s gaze flicked toward Noah before returning to me. His expression hardened again.

“This will be the last time I hear about that witch. You’re not going back to her.” His Alpha

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tone left no room for argument. “You’ll stay here in Grayson territory. I’ll find another way to

deal with the vampire blood.”

My thoughts began to spiral.

Damon had already been searching for a solution for so long. He had summoned experts from different packs, consulted healers, and searched through every piece of information he could find, yet none of them had been able to cure me.

Mara was the only person who had given me a possible answer that didn’t have a 1% survival chance. What if she really was the only one who could cure me? What if this was my only

chance?

My determination hardened.

I lifted my eyes to Damon and shook my head. “There may not be another way.”

His expression tightened.

“Damon, Mara might be the only person who can help me.”

“I’ll keep searching until I find another way, Aria.” His voice was firm, almost frightening in its certainty. “I’m not willing to risk your life again.”

I stared at him.

Part of me wanted to argue until he finally understood. Another part of me understood exactly where his anger was coming from.

He wasn’t trying to stop me because he didn’t trust me. He was terrified. Terrified that one day I would leave and never come back. But I couldn’t allow his fear to decide my future.

Before I could respond, another thought entered my mind.

“Noah is injured. He needs to be treated.”

Damon’s expression hardened again. He glanced toward Noah before turning toward the door. “I’ll have the healer look at him.”

Then he walked out.

I watched him disappear, my chest heavy with everything left unsaid.

That night, I couldn't sleep. I kept replaying our conversation in my head. Every word, every

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moment when his fear had broken through his anger.

But no matter how many times I went over it, my decision remained the same. I needed to speak to Mara again.

Eventually, I left my room and made my way to the room Damon was staying in.

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Chapter 405

Aria's POV

I found Damon standing near the window with his arms crossed over his chest. Moonlight spilled through the glass, outlining his broad shoulders and casting half of his face in shadow.

He seemed lost in thought. I stepped inside, and the moment he heard me, he turned.

His eyes met mine.

For several seconds, neither of us spoke. I closed the door behind me and finally broke the silence. "I'm still going to see the witch."

His shoulders stiffened. "I knew you would say that."

I held his gaze. "I can't simply forget what the vampire blood has done to me. I can feel it. It

is still very much a part of me." I pressed a hand against my chest. "It wants to take control

of me, Damon."

I lowered my hand, my fingers trembling slightly. "I'm scared."

His expression softened.

"I don't want that darkness following me forever. I don't want to wake up one day and realize

the vampire bloodline has taken something from me that I can never get back."

Damon crossed the room and gently led me to the chair. He sat beside me, his attention never leaving my face. "And you really think this witch can remove it?"

"Yes, she can."

The lie felt heavy on my tongue. I refused to tell him that Mara had already sent Noah and me

away, insisting that she would never help me. If I told him, Damon would hold on to that fact

and use it as another reason to stop me from going back.

I couldn't let that happen.

Damon remained silent for several seconds. I reached for his hand, intertwining my fingers with his.

"Damon, please. I need to do this."

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He looked down at our joined hands, his thumb slowly brushing over my knuckles.

"I want a life with you," I whispered. "A real one. I want to wake up beside you without wondering if the vampire bloodline is waiting for an opportunity to take control. I want Elona

to grow up without seeing her mother fighting the same darkness over and over again."

His fingers tightened around mine.

"Our pup deserves that," I continued softly. "And so do we."

Damon's eyes lifted to mine. "You really think this is the only way?"

“I think it’s the best chance we have.”

He looked away.

For a long moment, neither of us spoke. Then he released a slow breath.

“I hate this,” he admitted. “I hate that the person who might save you is someone I can’t trust,

and I hate that I can’t protect you from everything.”

“I understand.” I leaned closer to him until our shoulders touched. “You don’t have to protect

me from everything.”

His eyes met mine.

“Just don’t stop standing beside me.”

Something inside him seemed to break. Without another word, he pulled me into his arms.

I rested my head against his chest, listening to the steady rhythm of his heartbeat. The familiar sound eased something inside me that I hadn’t realized was still tense.

Rhein is calm.

Lydia’s voice carried a quiet contentment.

A small smile touched my lips.

For now. That’s enough.

Damon’s arms tightened around me. “If you go,” he murmured against my hair, “you won’t go

alone with Noah. I’ll send some warriors with you.”

I lifted my head. “Damon...”

“I’m not changing my mind about that.”

Despite everything, I smiled. “Thank you.”

He brushed his fingers gently through my hair before pressing his lips against my forehead.

“Just promise me you will come back to me.”

My throat tightened. “I will. I promise.”

He searched my eyes for several seconds, as though he needed to make sure I truly meant it.

Then he pulled me against him again.

I closed my eyes and let myself sink into his embrace.

At that moment, I allowed myself to imagine a future where the vampire bloodline was finally

gone. A future where I wouldn’t have to fear losing control of myself.

A future where Damon wouldn’t have to look at me and wonder if the darkness inside me would eventually take me away from him.

That night, I stayed in Damon’s arms, listening to his heartbeat until my eyes grew heavy.

Tomorrow, I would set out with Noah and meet the witch again. This time, I wouldn’t take no

for an answer.

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 406

Asia’s POV

The next morning, I left Grayson territory with Noah and several guards.

The forest stretched endlessly around us as we moved between the trees. The morning air was cold against my skin, carrying the scents of damp earth, pine, and distant wolves. I pulled my coat tighter around myself, but the chill I felt had little to do with the weather.

We were going back to Mara.

I had no idea what awaited us, but I knew I couldn't turn back.

When we finally arrived at the witch's dwelling, Noah glanced at me. "Are you ready?"

I drew in a slow breath and shook my head. "No."

He chuckled softly. "At least you're honest."

I managed a faint smile before turning toward the door. I raised my hand and knocked.

There was no response.

I knocked again, harder this time.

"Leave." Mara's voice came from inside.

I exchanged a glance with Noah before facing the door again.

"I'm back, Mara. Please open the door. Let's talk," I called.

"No." Her answer came immediately. "I told you already. I don't want to be involved."

I stepped closer to the door. "You're the only one who can help me, Mara. Please."

"I already made it clear that I will not help you."

My chest tightened.

Noah stepped forward. "We're not asking you to fight anyone. All we want is for you to rid Aria of this vampire bloodline."

"I don't care what you're asking."

His expression darkened, but I reached out and touched his arm.

"Let me."

Noah looked at me for a moment before stepping back. I turned toward the door.

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"Mara, I understand why you're afraid."

Silence answered me.

“But I’m not here because I want power. I’m not here because I want to become stronger than

everyone else. I’m here because I want to live.”

Still, nothing.

I swallowed hard. “I have a daughter.”

The silence on the other side of the door changed. It was subtle, almost imperceptible, but I felt it.

I continued. “She’s young. Her name is Elona.” My voice trembled slightly. “Everything I’ve done

lately has been because I want to go back to her safely.”

Noah lowered his gaze. I pressed my palm against the wooden door, feeling the rough surface beneath my fingers.

“I don’t want to become a vampire. I can’t accept becoming someone my own daughter can’t even

come near.”

My throat tightened. “What kind of mother would I be if I allowed that?”

Lydia grew quiet inside me.

You don’t ever want to hurt her.

I know.

If you become a vampire, that’s exactly what you will do. Don’t give up on getting help, Aria.

I closed my eyes. “Please. You have to help me.”

I took a shaky breath, my fingers curling against the wood.

“I want to be there when my daughter grows up. I want to hear her call for me when she’s frightened. I want to be the person she runs to when the world becomes too much.”

My eyes burned.

“I don’t want to become someone she cannot even come near because she’s afraid of what I might

do to her.”

The silence stretched between us. Seconds passed. Then a minute. Noah looked at me, but h

didn’t speak. Neither did I.

I simply stood there with my palm against the door, hoping that somehow my words had rea

the woman on the other side.

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Finally, I heard slow footsteps approaching. My heartbeat quickened. The lock clicked, and the

door opened slightly.

Mara stood behind it.

Her eyes moved from me to Noah before returning to me. For several seconds, she said nothing.

Then her gaze softened. “You have a daughter.”

I nodded. “Yes.”

“How old is she?”

“She’s six years old.”

Mara’s fingers tightened around the edge of the door. “And you want to do this for her?”

I nodded. “Yes. I want to rid myself of the vampire bloodline because of her.”

Something that looked like pain flickered across the witch’s face.

For the first time, she didn't look like the frightening woman I had encountered before. She looked

like a mother carrying an old wound.

She lowered her gaze. "I know what it is to want to come home to your child."

My breath caught. Noah remained silent beside me.

Mara looked at me again, and this time there was something different in her eyes. It wasn't trust,

but there was understanding.

She slowly opened the door wider. "Come in."

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Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 407

Axia's POV

Axia's POV

The moment I stepped inside the witch's home, my entire body reacted.

A sharp pressure settled over my skin, almost like invisible hands pressing against every part of me. My breathing grew heavier, and a dull ache spread through my chest.

Lydia immediately stirred.

Something here is hurting us.

I know.

I forced myself to keep walking. The walls were covered with sigils. Some had been carved directly into the stone, while others had been painted onto strips of dark cloth and hung from the

ceiling.

Bundles of dried herbs dangled beside jars filled with strange powders and dark liquids. Crystals

sat on shelves, glowing faintly beneath the dim light.

There were silver blades, vials filled with what looked like blackened blood, chains etched with

strange symbols, and pieces of weapons that I recognized as vampire weapons.

Everything in the room seemed designed for one purpose. To repel or destroy vampires.

The witch noticed me staring. “You feel it, don’t you?”

I looked at her. “The pressure?”

She nodded. “My home is protected against vampires. Your body is carrying vampire blood, so the

wards recognize it.”

My fingers curled into my palms.

“So your magic is hurting me because of what’s inside me.”

“Not intentionally.” She walked past me and touched one of the sigils carved into the wall. “The protections are designed to react to vampire essence. Your blood is triggering them.”

Noah, who had been quietly observing the room, glanced around. “You’ve built this entire place to

keep vampires out.”

The witch’s expression changed. “Not just to keep them out.”

Her fingers tightened around the edge of the table. “To destroy them.”

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Something in her voice made the room feel colder.

studied her. “Is there a reason you hate them so much?”

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For a moment, she didn't answer. Then she walked toward one of the shelves, her fingers brushing

over a small wooden box.

"I had a daughter."

Noah and I both fell silent.

The witch opened the box. Inside was a necklace, a simple silver chain with a small pendant.

"She was beautiful, strong, and clever," the witch continued. "She was also young enough to believe

the world was kinder than it really was."

I looked at the necklace. "What happened to her?"

The witch's eyes darkened. "Vampires happened."

My chest tightened.

She closed her fingers around the pendant.

"A vampire found her and convinced her that she was special. He promised her immortality and power. A life where she would never have to fear sickness or death."

Her voice trembled. "He called her his bride. My daughter believed him." She looked down at the

pendant. "She left with him."

Noah's expression hardened. "And he turned her?"

"He tried." The witch's voice became bitter. "The turning failed."

I swallowed. "What happened?"

"Her body rejected the vampire blood." The witch looked at me. "She died."

Silence settled over the room.

I could almost feel the grief hanging in the air. Noah's hand found mine, his fingers closing gently

around them.

The witch slowly closed the box.

"After that, I spent years learning everything I could about vampires." She gestured toward the walls. "How their blood works. How their turning happens. How their weaknesses can be exploited. I learned how to destroy them."

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Her gaze moved toward the shelves. "And eventually, I discovered something else. A way to

reverse a vampire's turning."

My heart gave a painful beat. "That's the technique you were talking about."

She nodded. "Yes."

Hope flickered inside me.

Then she extinguished it with her next words. "But it will not work on you."

I stared at her. "Why?"

"Because you were not turned." She stepped closer. "The vampire blood inside you is part of your lineage. You carry it by birth."

I frowned. "I still became part vampire."

"Your situation is different." She pointed toward my chest. "The blood was awakened inside you. It wasn't introduced into your body through a conventional turning. Your wolf and vampire blood have existed together in a way that should not be possible."

My stomach tightened. "So the technique won't separate them."

"It might."

Hope returned for half a second. Then she shook her head.

"But forcing the separation would place enormous strain on your body."

“How much?”

“Enough to kill you.”

Noah’s grip tightened around my hand. “No. There has to be another way.”

The witch looked at him, her eyes narrowed. “I have spent decades studying this. There isn’t another way.”

Noah stepped forward, his Alpha aura rising sharply. “I’m telling you to find another solution.”

“Noah.”

I touched his arm. He turned toward me. I could see the anger in his eyes, but beneath it was something else. Fear.

His expression softened slightly when he looked at me.

I turned back to the witch. “I need to know more about how this works.”

Q

+25 Pointe

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A sharp pressure settled over my skin, almost like invisible hands pressing against every part of me. My breathing grew heavier, and a dull ache spread through my chest.

Lydia immediately stirred.

Something here is hurting us.

I know.

I forced myself to keep walking. The walls were covered with sigils. Some had been carved directly into the stone, while others had been painted onto strips of dark cloth and hung from the

ceiling.

Bundles of dried herbs dangled beside jars filled with strange powders and dark liquids. Crystals

sat on shelves, glowing faintly beneath the dim light.

There were silver blades, vials filled with what looked like blackened blood, chains etched with

strange symbols, and pieces of weapons that I recognized as vampire weapons.

Everything in the room seemed designed for one purpose. To repel or destroy vampires.

The witch noticed me staring. “You feel it, don’t you?”

I looked at her. “The pressure?”

She nodded. “My home is protected against vampires. Your body is carrying vampire blood, so the

wards recognize it.”

My fingers curled into my palms.

“So your magic is hurting me because of what’s inside me.”

“Not intentionally.” She walked past me and touched one of the sigils carved into the wall. “The protections are designed to react to vampire essence. Your blood is triggering them.”

Noah, who had been quietly observing the room, glanced around. “You’ve built this entire place to

keep vampires out.”

The witch’s expression changed. “Not just to keep them out.”

Her fingers tightened around the edge of the table. “To destroy them.”

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< Chapter 407

Something in her voice made the room feel colder.

studied her. “Is there a reason you hate them so much?”

+25 Romt

For a moment, she didn’t answer. Then she walked toward one of the shelves, her fingers brushing

over a small wooden box.

“I had a daughter.”

Noah and I both fell silent.

The witch opened the box. Inside was a necklace, a simple silver chain with a small pendant.

“She was beautiful, strong, and clever,” the witch continued. “She was also young enough to believe

the world was kinder than it really was.”

I looked at the necklace. “What happened to her?”

The witch’s eyes darkened. “Vampires happened.”

My chest tightened.

She closed her fingers around the pendant.

“A vampire found her and convinced her that she was special. He promised her immortality and power. A life where she would never have to fear sickness or death.”

Her voice trembled. “He called her his bride. My daughter believed him.” She looked down at the

pendant. “She left with him.”

Noah’s expression hardened. “And he turned her?”

“He tried.” The witch’s voice became bitter. “The turning failed.”

I swallowed. “What happened?”

“Her body rejected the vampire blood.” The witch looked at me. “She died.”

Silence settled over the room.

I could almost feel the grief hanging in the air. Noah’s hand found mine, his fingers closing gently

around them.

The witch slowly closed the box.

“After that, I spent years learning everything I could about vampires.” She gestured toward the walls. “How their blood works. How their turning happens. How their weaknesses can be exploited. I learned how to destroy them.”

OG

< Chapter 407

Her gaze moved toward the shelves. “And eventually, I discovered something else. A way to

reverse a vampire’s turning.”

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His expression softened slightly when he looked at me.

I turned back to the witch. “I need to know more about how this works.”

Q

+25 Points

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 408

Aria’s POV

The witch studied me for a moment before answering.

“The working would attempt to strip the vampire blood from your system while preserving your wolf. But because the vampire blood is part of your natural lineage, the process would not know where to stop.”

She paused. “That means it could attack your wolf too.”

Lydia went silent. I could feel her listening.

The witch continued. “If the working damages your connection to your wolf, you could lose her.”

My heart clenched.

Lydia.

I’m here.

Her voice was quieter than usual, but she was still there.

The witch looked directly into my eyes. “And if the spell fails completely, your body may not survive it.”

Noah shook his head. “Then we’re done.”

I looked at him. “No, we are not. This is my decision to make, Noah.”

His face hardened. “You heard what she said, Aria. She said it could kill you.”

“I know.”

I stepped closer to him. “But what other choice do I have?”

Noah stared at me, his expression filled with helplessness.

I looked down at my hands.

“Every night, I think about my daughter. I think about Damon, my family, and everyone I love. Every night, I wonder what will happen if the vampire blood becomes stronger.”

My voice trembled. “What if I lose control?”

Noah’s expression softened, but I continued.

“What if I wake up one night and Elona is standing beside my bed? What if I hurt her before I even realize what I’m doing? What if I hurt someone else I love?”

My stomach twisted. “I can’t keep living like this.”

Noah’s voice softened. “Aria...”

I turned toward the witch. Fear still clawed at my chest, but beneath it was a stronger force of

determination.

“I will take the risk.”

Mara let out a sigh. “Alright, then. I will perform the ritual,” she said, her ancient eyes fixed on me. “But not here. The working must be done on my grounds, where the magic is strongest. You will need to remain there for approximately one week.”

A week. That didn’t frighten me. After everything I had survived, seven days felt insignificant.

I told Mara I would return to Grayson territory, inform my people that I would be away for a week, and then come back.

When Noah and I returned to Grayson territory, Damon was eager to find out how it had gone. I took him to the study and explained everything, leaving out the part about the ritual potentially costing me my life.

When I finished, he immediately frowned. He clearly didn't like the idea of me staying with the witch for a week. "You're not going back."

I sighed. "Damon."

"I'm serious, Aria." His jaw tightened. "You just met this witch again. You don't know what she's planning."

"She agreed to help me."

"And she wants you isolated in her territory for an entire week."

"She needs to perform the ritual where her magic is strongest."

"Or maybe that's what she wants you to believe."

I stared at him. "Do you really think Mara went through all of that just to lure me somewhere?"

"I don't know." His voice softened. "That's exactly the problem."

The mate bond pulsed between us, carrying emotions that words couldn't quite express. His fear brushed against mine, and beneath it was something deeper. The thought of losing me terrified him.

I reached for his hand. "I'll come back, Damon. It's just a week."

He looked down at our joined hands, his thumb brushing slowly across my knuckles. "That doesn't make me less afraid, Aria. Please, at least think it over for a few days. Be sure this is the right thing to do before you go."

My heart ached. I thought about it for a moment, then nodded. "Fine. I'll think about it."

Damon smiled faintly. "Thank you."

Damon took me away from Grayson territory that afternoon. He wanted me to go with him to his estate in the Silvermoon Pack.

He needed to handle a few things there, but it almost felt as though he wanted me with him at all times because he was afraid I would return to the witch the moment he left me behind in Grayson territory.

We didn't say much during the journey. I sat beside him in the car, watching the landscape pass through

the window while the silence between us grew heavier.

Lydia was unusually quiet.

He's worried.

I know.

He thinks we're going to leave him.

I looked at Damon. His hands were firmly wrapped around the steering wheel, his expression hard and his eyes fixed on the road.

We're not leaving him.

Then why does he look like he's preparing to lose us?

I didn't have an answer.

When we arrived at the Hawthorne estate, Damon told me to rest. "I'll be back. I need to handle something."

I studied him. He was hiding something, but I didn't press him.

He left the room. A few minutes later, I saw him enter his office. I wasn't trying to listen, at least, that's what I told myself. But werewolf hearing made privacy difficult. His voice carried clearly through the partially closed door as he spoke to someone on the phone.

"Devin, I need you to investigate someone."

I froze.

Comments

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 409

Aria's POV

Damon continued, "A witch named Mara."

There was a long pause on the other end. Then Devin's voice came through the phone.

"Mara?"

Damon frowned. "Yes."

Another silence followed. When Devin spoke again, he sounded genuinely shocked.

"Where did you hear that name?"

"She's the witch Aria wants to see."

"That's impossible. Mara disappeared decades ago."

My heart started pounding.

The door to Damon's office was slightly ajar. I leaned against the wall and carefully peered inside.

Damon was standing beside his desk. "Disappeared?"

"She was already considered ancient when I was studying magic. She was one of the most powerful witches ever known. People stopped hearing from her years ago. I really thought she was dead."

Damon's gaze sharpened. "You thought she was dead?"

"Yes, but I never found proof of her death." Devin exhaled. "If you're talking about the same Mara, her power is far beyond mine."

Damon went quiet for a moment. "How much farther?"

"Enough that I wouldn't even compare myself to her."

My eyes widened.

Devin continued, "If she's truly willing to perform the spell, Aria's chances are significantly better than they would be with anyone else."

Damon's expression changed. "So you believe she can remove the vampire bloodline?"

"I believe she's one of the few people alive who might be capable of doing it."

My chest loosened. Hope began to replace the fear that had been twisting inside me ever since I left Mara's dwelling.

Damon ended the call. I stepped into the office, and his gaze immediately found me.

"How much of that did you hear?"

& Chapter 400

I smiled. "Enough."

He sighed as I walked toward him. "So, after hearing what Devin said, do you still think I'm making a mistake?"

He didn't answer immediately.

That was answer enough.

I smiled faintly. "Thank you for checking."

"I'm still not happy about this, but Devin's opinion matters."

I nodded. "Then I'll take it as reassurance."

Damon looked at me for several seconds before speaking. "Don't thank me yet, because this time around, I'm going with you."

A small smile touched my lips. That didn't really bother me. I would just have to make sure Mara didn't tell him about the risk involved.

"Alright. No problem."

The next day, after Damon finished handling pack business, we returned to Grayson territory. I invited Noah over, and when he arrived, I told him about Devin's confirmation.

Noah's expression relaxed. "That's good. At least we know she's truly capable."

"She is." I smiled at him. "Thank you."

His brows furrowed. "For what?"

"For helping me find Mara."

Noah shrugged. "You would've found another way."

"Maybe." I looked at him. "But I don't think I would've found this way."

His gaze softened. "I'm glad I could help."

A strange warmth settled in my chest. Before I could say anything else, I sensed Damon approaching. His Alpha presence reached me before his footsteps did.

Noah noticed it too. He straightened.

Damon stopped several feet away, his gaze moving from Noah to me. The tension returned instantly.

I sighed. "Damon."

"What?" he asked. "I'm not doing anything."

"You don't have to."

His brow lifted. I walked toward him. "You need to keep the peace with Noah."

His eyes narrowed. "Why?"

"Because I don't want this becoming another problem. The three of us will be going on this journey Together. I don't want the two of you continuing to be at odds with each other."

Damon stared at me before exhaling slowly. "Fine."

I smiled. "Thank you."

He took my hand. "But don't expect me to like or trust him."

"I don't expect that."

Noah shook his head with a faint smile. "I'll take what I can get."

Damon glared at him again, and I squeezed his hand gently. For now, that was enough.

Mara had given me a chance. Devin had confirmed that she was powerful enough to succeed. Maybe we could finally be free.

Lydia's voice softened inside me.

Maybe.

I held Damon's hand tighter.

For now, that hope was enough.

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Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 410

Aria's POV

The next morning, Damon, Noah, and I left before sunrise. The three of us stood near the vehicles while the estate slowly woke around us.

Damon looked at me. "Ready?"

I nodded. "As ready as I'll ever be."

He stepped closer and pulled me into his arms. "I can't wait for all of this to be over so you can finally be free again." His voice was barely above a whisper.

I held him tightly. "Me too."

His lips brushed against my forehead. The mate bond warmed between us, spreading through my chest like a quiet reassurance. Rhein stirred inside him, and even through the bond, I could sense his wolf's protective presence.

Lydia answered instinctively. Tell Rhein to stop worrying.

A small smile touched my lips. He's an Alpha. Worrying is apparently part of the job.

Lydia huffed. Then we're doomed.

I almost laughed.

Noah cleared his throat. "We should leave."

Damon reluctantly released me. We climbed into the vehicle, and moments later, we began the journey.

The estate disappeared behind us as the forest grew denser. Trees crowded the road, their branches stretching overhead and blocking out the morning light. Hours passed, and the deeper we traveled, the more isolated the surroundings became.

Finally, Noah pointed ahead. "We're close."

My stomach tightened.

I remembered Mara's dwelling clearly. The ancient stone walls. The strange symbols carved into almost every surface. The heavy magic that had filled the air around it.

But when we reached the clearing, I knew immediately that something was wrong.

The vehicle came to a stop. I stepped out, and my breath caught in my throat. The stone house was gone, Not abandoned. It was destroyed.

Large sections of the walls had collapsed, leaving piles of broken stone scattered across the clearing. Strange sigils had been ripped apart, their markings fractured across the ground. Glass containers lay shattered among the dirt, their contents spilled and mixed with mud. Herbs were scattered everywhere, some crushed beneath what looked like footprints.

Burned pages from spell books fluttered weakly in the wind.

My heart began pounding: "No."

I ran forward.

"Aria!" Damon shouted behind me.

I barely heard him. I stumbled through the ruins, frantically searching for any sign of life.

"Mara!"

Silence answered me. I searched again, my pulse racing as panic clawed its way up my throat.

"Mara!"

V

There was nothing... No voice, no movement, no sign of the witch who had given me the first real hope that I could rid myself of the vampire bloodline.

Noah crouched beside one of the broken sigils, examining the ground. His expression darkened.

"This wasn't an accident."

Damon's expression hardened as he surveyed the destruction. "No, it wasn't."

I turned slowly, staring at the ruins around me. Someone had come here. Someone had deliberately destroyed Mara's home and taken her.

Suddenly, the hope I had carried all the way here began slipping through my fingers.

I crouched beside the broken stones and brushed my fingers over the dirt. Something immediately caught my attention.

Tracks.

They weren't wolf tracks. They weren't human either. They were deeper than ordinary footprints, with sharp impressions at the front where claws had dug into the earth.

My stomach dropped.

I lowered my head and inhaled. The scent was faint beneath the lingering smell of smoke and burnt herbs, but Lydia caught it immediately.

Vampires.

My blood ran cold. They had been here.

I stood abruptly. "Damon."

He was already beside me. "What?"

I pointed toward the tracks. "This was done by vampires."

His expression changed instantly, his eyes narrowing as he examined the ground.

Noah crouched beside me and studied the tracks carefully. "You're right."

I looked around the clearing again. The broken spell components. The overturned shelves. The shattered

containers. The burned pages scattered across the ground.

There was only one reason the vampires would have come for Mara.

"This happened because of me."

Damon immediately grabbed my wrist. I looked at him.

"They were looking for Mara because she was going to treat me."

"That doesn't mean this is your fault."

"But they knew." My voice tightened. "They knew she could remove the vampire bloodline from me." I drew in a deep breath, forcing myself to stay calm. "We need to find her."

Damon nodded without hesitation. “We will.”

I turned toward the surrounding forest. “We need to do that now.”

“Aria...”

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“I’m not waiting.” My voice came out harder than I intended. “Mara could still be alive. We need to find her before they kill her.”

Top Pick

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 411

Aria’s POV

Noah stood and looked toward the forest. “She’s right.”

Damon glanced between us. For a moment, he looked like he wanted to argue, but eventually he nodded. “All right.”

We immediately sent for reinforcements from both the Grayson and Silvermoon territories. As soon as they arrived, I began organizing the search.

I divided our forces into groups and instructed them to spread throughout the surrounding territory while maintaining enough distance from one another to respond quickly if anyone encountered danger.

“We’re looking for a witch named Mara,” I said, giving them her description. “Don’t approach anything suspicious alone. If you find her trail, report immediately.”

One of the warriors nodded. “What if we find vampires?”

I felt Lydia stir inside me. We fight.

I kept my expression calm. “You don’t engage unless you have backup. We don’t know how many of them are still in the area.”

Damon stepped forward. His Alpha aura spread through the clearing, making the warriors straighten instinctively.

“Also, increase the perimeter patrols. Nothing enters or leaves this area without being detected.”

The warriors bowed their heads. “Yes, Alpha.”

I looked toward the forest.

Somewhere beyond those trees, Mara could be injured. She could be frightened, alone, and fighting for her life.

Or worse.

I couldn’t allow myself to think about the second possibility.

The search continued into the night. We found traces. Broken branches. Drops of blood. Pieces of torn cloth. But there was no sign of Mara.

By the second day, exhaustion had begun settling into my bones. We had barely slept, surviving on short breaks between searches. Every time I closed my eyes, I saw the destroyed dwelling again.

While moving through another section of the forest, Lydia suddenly became alert inside me.

Something is wrong, Aria. We’re being watched.

I slowed.

Noah, who was walking several feet ahead of me, glanced back. “What?”

Hooked around. “Nothing.”

But my wolf disagreed. Look over there.

I turned toward the trees. There was nothing. Only shadows and swaying branches. I tightened my grip around the weapon at my side. “We should stop.”

Noah frowned. “Why?”

“I don’t know.”

Damon had remained with another search group several hundred yards away. I could still feel the faint pull of our mate bond, but the distance made the connection weaker. I wished he were closer.

Noah studied me for a moment. “You’re sensing something.”

“Yes!”

He immediately became more alert. “Everyone, stay sharp.”

The warriors spread out, their weapons ready. For several seconds, nothing happened.

Then I heard it. A branch snapped behind us.

I spun around. “Who’s there?”

There was silence. My heart hammered against my ribs. Another branch snapped. This time, from the opposite direction.

My pulse jumped. “They’re surrounding us.”

Noah’s eyes hardened. “Everyone, formation!”

The forest exploded. Figures rushed from between the trees, moving so quickly they seemed to blur. My stomach dropped.

Vampires. There were at least a dozen of them.

They surrounded us before we could fully react, their movements unnaturally fast and coordinated. Their eyes weren’t fixed on Noah or the warriors.

They were fixed on me. One of them smiled.

“We have finally found her.”

Lydia snarled inside me. They came for us.

I stepped backward as the warriors immediately moved in front of me.

“Protect Alpha Grayson!”

The vampires attacked. The first one slammed into a warrior with enough force to send both of them crashing into a tree. Another vampire lunged straight toward me.

I ducked beneath his claws and drove my elbow into his ribs. He barely moved. His hand shot toward me

again

Shift. Lydia’s voice thundered through my mind.

I released my control. Pain ripped through my body as bones shifted and claws tore through my fingertips. My senses exploded, every sound becoming sharper, every scent more distinct.

I shifted partially, allowing Lydia to surge through my body. The vampire came at me again. I caught his

wrist.

He snarled, his fangs flashing. "You belong to us."

I drove my claws across his chest. He staggered backward, staring at the wounds.

"No, I don't," I growled.

Another vampire attacked from behind. Noah intercepted him before he could reach me. Their bodies collided, and Noah drove the vampire backward.

"Aria, move!"

They weren't trying to kill me. They were trying to capture me alive.

The realization was worse.

One of them smiled. "We need her alive."

The vampire lunged. I stopped holding back.

I shifted fully. My body dropped toward the ground as bones snapped into place and fur erupted across my skin. Lydia surged forward, taking control as my jaws snapped shut around the vampire's arm.

He screamed. I whipped my head sideways and threw him into the dirt.

Run, Lydia growled.

No. I turned toward the vampires surrounding us, my claws digging into the earth.

We fight them.

A roar suddenly echoed through the forest.

It was Damon.

His Alpha command thundered through the trees, filled with enough power to make the ground seem to

vibrate.

“GET AWAY FROM MY MATE!”

The vampires froze for half a second. It was enough. I lunged at the nearest one. The forest erupted into

chaos.

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 412

Aria’s POV

Claws tore through flesh, fangs snapped, and wolves snarled as vampires darted between the trees with unnatural speed. The clearing had become a blur of bodies, blood, and shifting

shadows.

I lunged at one of the vampires, driving my claws toward his chest, but another appeared from my blind side.

I barely had time to turn before his claws raked across my arm.

Pain exploded through me. I stumbled backward, clutching my arm as blood immediately soaked through my sleeve. The metallic scent filled my nose, and Lydia snarled inside me.

He’s coming again.

“Aria!” Damon’s voice cut through the chaos.

“I’m fine!”

The vampire lunged at me again. I ducked beneath his attack, spun, and drove my claws into

his chest. He staggered backward with a growl. I kicked him away and turned toward another

attacker, ready to strike.

Then I froze. Something felt wrong. The pain in my arm was already fading.

I glanced down. The wound was closing. Not slowly. The torn flesh knitted itself together right before my eyes, the bleeding stopped, and within seconds, only a thin red mark remained.

My breath caught. It had healed faster than it ever had before, even with the vampire blood.

Aria. Lydia's voice sounded different. More alert, almost uneasy. The vampire bloodline is becoming more active.

I know.

I touched the faint mark on my arm. There was barely any pain left.

How was this happening?

Damon reached me a moment later, his eyes immediately dropping to my arm. "Let me see

that wound."

I instinctively pulled my arm away. "Damon..."

"Aria."

His Alpha command rumbled through his voice.

I reluctantly held out my arm.

His expression hardened when he saw the nearly healed wound. He didn't need me to explain. He already knew what it meant.

Noah appeared beside us, blood smeared across his cheek and his chest rising and falling from the fight. His gaze dropped to my arm.

"That was just cut open," he said. "It shouldn't have healed that quickly."

“I know.” I stared at the fading mark and swallowed. “The vampire blood is becoming more

active. I can feel it.”

A strange warmth spread beneath my skin. Then came the cold.

It crawled up my arm like ice beneath my veins, making my fingers tingle. I clenched my fist, fighting the uncomfortable sensation.

“It wasn’t doing this before,” I said.

Noah’s eyes narrowed. “What changed?”

I looked toward the forest. My thoughts raced through everything that had happened. The vampires. Mara’s destroyed home. The ambush. The way they had targeted me.

Then the answer struck me.

“They’re doing something.”

Damon frowned. “Who?”

“The vampires.” I looked down at my arm again. “The blood is being activated.”

His expression darkened. “Can they control it?”

“I don’t know.” I shook my head. “But I can feel something stirring it. It’s almost like they’re

forcing it to awaken.”

Before either of them could respond, a vampire burst through the trees.

Damon moved instantly. “Get behind me.”

His eyes flashed gold as he shifted halfway, claws extending from his fingertips. The vampire

lunged, but Damon caught him by the throat and slammed him against a tree hard enough to

shake the branches.

Rhein’s roar thundered through the forest.

The vampire struggled, his feet kicking against the trunk as Damon's claws tightened around

his throat.

"Who sent you?" Damon growled.

The vampire laughed despite the blood running from the corner of his mouth. "She is the one

we want."

He pointed toward me. Damon's eyes became murderous. "Why do you want her?"

The vampire smiled. "Because she is one of us."

Damon struck him across the face. "Where is the witch, Mara?"

The vampire spat blood onto the ground. "She's safe. Somewhere far beyond your reach."

He laughed again. Damon's claws dug deeper into his throat.

"You're going to tell me where she is."

"Wait." My voice stopped him.

Damon looked at me, but I was already stepping forward. I approached the vampire slowly,

keeping my eyes fixed on him.

"Why are you trying to take me alive?"

The vampire stared at me for several seconds. Then his gaze dropped to my arm.

His smile widened. "Because you're changing."

My stomach tightened.

"Your blood is waking up."

Damon slammed him into the ground before he could say anything else. The vampire's head

struck the earth, and his body went limp.

I barely noticed. I was staring at my arm.

He's right, Lydia whispered. Something is forcing the vampire blood to awaken faster.

My breathing became shallow. Can we stop it?

There was a pause. Then Lydia answered.

I don't know.

Fear tightened around my chest.

The remaining vampires suddenly began retreating.

Damon's head snapped toward them. "Don't let them escape!"

Top Pick

My

ated Luman

Juna

My Fated Human Luna

TheNich29 | Completed | 18+

Readers rave: A heart-wrenching

tale of love and betrayal.

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Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 413

Aria's POV

Our wolves surged after them. The forest erupted again as claws tore through the undergrowth and snarls echoed between the trees.

But the vampires were already disappearing into the darkness, moving with unnatural speed.

One by one, their figures vanished between the trees until even their scents began to fade.

Then silence slowly returned. I stood motionless, staring at the faint red mark on my arm.

Damon approached me. His hands settled gently around my shoulders.

“Look at me.”

I raised my eyes.

“I’m here.” His voice was steady, completely different from the fury that had filled it moments

ago. “We’ll figure this out.”

I wanted to believe him. I really did. But beneath my skin, I could feel it. The vampire bloodline

was awakening. And this time, I knew it wasn’t happening naturally.

Someone was accelerating my transformation. Someone was forcing the vampire blood inside me to become stronger, and whoever was behind it wasn’t going to stop until that blood had completely taken over.

Seeing how many warriors had been injured, I decided to tend to them. Damon instructed Noah and a few warriors to stay and guard us while he continued the search with the remaining able-bodied wolves.

The scent of vampires lingered everywhere, sharp and bitter against the damp forest air, even

though they were already gone.

I moved from one injured wolf to another, checking their wounds and helping where I could

while Noah stood a short distance away, his eyes constantly scanning the trees.

Barely an hour later, Damon emerged between the trees. He was carrying someone in his

arms.

My heart jumped when I recognized the woman. “Mara.”

The witch looked exhausted. Her clothes were torn, her dark hair tangled, and bruises covered parts of her face and arms. Damon lowered her carefully to the ground, his Alpha aura still rolling through the forest as he crouched beside her.

“I found her in an old mine shaft less than a mile from here,” he said. “The vampires had imprisoned her.”

I immediately moved toward her. “Mara, are you all right?”

She looked at me, then at Damon. Her eyes were tired, but there was still a sharpness in them. “I am alive,” she replied hoarsely. “That is enough for now.”

Damon’s jaw tightened. “She said she escaped before the attack on her dwelling, but the vampires found her afterward and imprisoned her.”

Mara nodded slowly. “I heard them searching the forest. I knew they were looking for me, so I

went deeper into the woods. They eventually found me.”

My stomach twisted. “We saw your home. They destroyed it.”

“I watched them destroy it from my hiding place.” Her voice was strangely emotionless, and

somehow that made it worse. “My books, herbs, crystals, the ritual tools I spent decades collecting. All of it was destroyed.”

My fingers curled into fists. The strange heat beneath my skin had grown stronger since the

battle, spreading through my veins in uncomfortable waves.

Mara immediately noticed.

“Something is happening to you,” she said quietly. “I can feel it.”

I told her exactly what I had been experiencing and how rapidly my wound had healed earlier.

She reached for my wrist and pressed two fingers against my pulse. Her expression changed

almost immediately.

“What is it?”

She didn’t answer. Instead, she closed her eyes. The air around us seemed to shift as Mara whispered something beneath her breath.

A faint pressure settled over my skin.

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I could feel her magic moving through me, searching beneath the surface, probing places even I couldn’t reach.

Then Mara’s eyes snapped open. “The turning is accelerating.”

Noah went completely still. “What does that mean?”

“It means the vampire blood inside her is awakening faster than it should.”

My stomach dropped.

“I knew it,” I whispered.

Damon turned toward Mara. “Can you stop it?”

✂

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 414

I

Chapter 414-

Aria's POV

"Not permanently." Mara looked at me. "I can slow it down for a short time."

Hope flickered in my chest. "How?"

"I can suppress the process."

Damon didn't hesitate. "Do it."

Mara's eyes dropped toward the ground. She immediately began gathering pieces of broken stone, fragments of wood, and several herbs from the forest.

She worked quickly, drawing rough sigils into the earth with a sharpened piece of stone. Her fingers moved with practiced precision despite her exhaustion.

Damon stood beside me. His fingers slipped into mine. I looked up at him. He stared at me for a moment, his expression tight with worry, before looking away. I squeezed his hand.

Mara suddenly called my name. "Aria. Sit in the center."

I obeyed. I lowered myself onto the ground while Mara finished drawing the circle around me. The symbols were rough, but they began to glow faintly beneath her fingers.

Mara placed both hands against my shoulders.

"Aria, this will hurt."

"How much?"

She sighed. "Enough."

gave

a humorless laugh. "That's reassuring."

The corner of her mouth lifted slightly. Then her expression became serious again. "When I begin, do not fight the spell, and do not let your vampire side take control."

Lydia snarled inside me. It won't. We won't let it.

I drew a slow breath. "Begin."

Mara whispered the first incantation. The sigils around me ignited. Pain exploded through my body.

I gasped and grabbed the earth beneath my fingers as every muscle in my body tensed. My bones felt as though they were burning from the inside. Heat raced through my veins, followed by an icy sensation that made my teeth chatter.

Damon took a step forward. "Aria!"

"I'm fine!" The lie barely left my mouth before another wave of pain tore through me.

I screamed.

Chapter 414-

Lydia surged forward Irrstinctively. Aria! Stay with me.

t could feel her pacing inside me, desperate to take control and protect me.

I'm here.

Please don't shut me out.

Her words hit me harder than the pain. I closed my eyes. I won't.

Mara's magic intensified.

The strange darkness inside me fought back violently. For one terrifying moment, I felt something cold spread through my chest. My fangs pressed against my gums as my senses sharpened to an almost unbearable degree.

Suddenly, every sound in the forest became painfully clear.

I could hear Damon breathing beside me. Noah's heartbeat. The rustling of leaves several yards away. The movement of injured wolves behind us.

And beneath it all, I could hear a voice. It was soft, cold, and seductive.

Give in.

My body trembled. "No."

Mara's eyes snapped toward me. "Hold on!"

The sigils flashed brighter.

The pressure inside my veins suddenly collapsed inward. I gasped as the burning sensation vanished, leaving behind an eerie emptiness.

For several seconds, I couldn't hear anything except my own ragged breathing.

Then my strength gave out. I slumped forward.

Damon was beside me instantly, catching me before I could hit the ground. "Aria."

"I'm okay." My voice was barely a whisper.

His arms tightened around me as he held me against his chest.

Mara slowly lowered her hands. For several seconds, she simply watched me, her expression unreadable.

Then she exhaled. "I managed to suppress the acceleration."

Damon looked at her. "How long will it last?"

Mara's expression turned grim. "Only a few days."

The relief that had barely begun to form inside me disappeared. "That's all?"

"Your transformation is still progressing beneath the suppression." She glanced at the glowing sigils around me. "I have only forced it back for now."

stared at the symbols beneath my hands. "What happens after those few days?"

Mara met my eyes.

+25 Pants

"If the formal stripping rite is not performed before the suppression fades, the process will resume."

My throat tightened. "And I'll turn?"

She nodded. "You will complete the turning."

Damon's arms tightened around me.

I looked down at my hands, suddenly aware of the faint darkness beneath my skin. I could still feel the vampire blood moving through my veins, waiting beneath the surface.

A few days. That was all we had.

If we failed to strip my vampire bloodline before the suppression faded, there would be no stopping what

came next.

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Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 415

Aria's POV

Mara's magic still burned beneath my skin like ice that refused to melt. I could feel it lingering through my veins, holding the strange darkness inside me at bay for now.

I pushed myself upright from Damon's grip and looked up at him.

"Are you really okay now?" he asked, his gaze filled with concern.

I nodded and managed a faint smile. "I'm okay."

The witch spoke, drawing our attention back to her.

"You've been a problem for the vampires for a while now," she said without preamble. "Every vampire you put down, every nest you burned, made you a target they couldn't ignore. Viktor's clan wasn't the only one keeping score."

I narrowed my eyes. "The ones that attacked us weren't his?"

"No." She shook her head. "They are a different faction. Older and hungrier for what you carry. The vampire bloodline inside you isn't just a stain, Aria. It's a key. Rare enough that more than one vampire clan would bleed cities dry to claim it."

A chill ran down my spine.

“They’ll try again,” Mara continued, as though she had sensed the fear rising inside me. “Sooner rather than later. They failed to take you tonight. They won’t make the same mistake twice.”

Damon stepped in front of me, his body instinctively shielding mine.

“They’re going to have to get through me first.”

Mara’s eyes shifted toward him. “That may not be enough.”

Damon’s jaw tightened. “Try me.”

The air around us suddenly became heavier.

His Alpha aura spread through the forest, powerful and commanding. The warriors nearby immediately straightened, while even Noah’s expression changed slightly beneath the pressure.

Rhein’s growl brushed against my mind through the mate bond.

No one takes our mate.

I reached for Damon’s hand, and his gaze dropped to mine.

“I’m not afraid of them,” I said quietly. “I’m afraid of what will happen if I do nothing.”

Mara slowly walked toward us.

“I have spent years fighting vampires, and eventually, I became a problem they could no longer ignore.”

<Chapter 415

She looked down at the soil, her expression distant.

“Every time I interfered with their plans, they came after me. I moved from place to place. Changed my protections. Changed my methods. But eventually, they decided I was too dangerous to leave alive.”

My chest tightened. “So they destroyed your home.”

“They destroyed everything they could find and captured me.”

Noah crossed his arms. “Why didn’t they kill you?”

Mara's expression darkened. "They wanted information. About many things, but especially about Aria."

Damon's grip tightened around my hand. "What did you tell them?"

"Nothing." A faint smile touched Mara's lips. "I have been dealing with vampires for too long to answer their questions."

Despite everything, I almost smiled. Then her expression became serious again.

"There are many factions still out there."

I stared at her. "How many factions?"

"More than you know."

The answer made my stomach sink.

"And they all know about me?"

"Not all of them. But the ones who do will eventually come looking."

Damon's eyes darkened. "Then we'll make sure they don't find her."

Mara shook her head. "You don't understand, Alpha." She looked directly at me. "The moment your transformation began accelerating, you became easier for them to track."

I held her gaze. "But you suppressed the acceleration."

"For now." Her voice remained calm, but her words sent another chill through me. "The spell is holding the acceleration back. It isn't removing the vampire blood. It is simply forcing it into dormancy. Once the spell wears off, the acceleration will continue from where it stopped."

I looked at Damon. He already knew what I was thinking.

"That means we need to go through with the stripping ritual as soon as possible," he said.

Mara's gaze softened slightly. "There is another problem."

I frowned. "What?"

"My materials. Most of the things I need were destroyed."

"Can you replace them?" Damon asked.

“Yes. I can replace some.” She glanced toward the forest. “Others might take time to acquire.”

Damon immediately nodded. “Tell us what they are, and we’ll get them.”

Noah stepped forward. “That’s right. Let us know what you need.”

+25 Painta

Mara looked between the two of them before answering. “I need enough moonstone to make a circle, silverthorn root, and black sage.”

Damon nodded without hesitation. “We’ll find them.”

A small smile appeared on Mara’s face. “Good. Once we have everything, I’ll need a safe place to begin preparing the rite.”

I glanced at her. “You can’t go back to your destroyed house or stay here in the forest. You’ll come with us.”

Mara raised an eyebrow. “Where?”

“Somewhere the vampires won’t expect.”

Damon looked at me. “Grayson territory?”

I nodded. “If they’re hunting me, they’ll expect me to run, but I’m not running.”

I lifted my gaze toward Mara, determination settling in my chest.

“I’ll complete the stripping rite before they make their next move. I refuse to give them the chance to take

me.”

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 416

Aria’s POV

+25 Pomt

By noon the next day, everything the witch had requested for the ritual had been gathered and brought to my territory.

The supplies were arranged inside a designated room. My skin prickled every time I stepped near the ritual chamber because of the amount of magic gathered in one place.

We had decided not to return to the old Grayson estate. I didn't want my daughter, father and brother to witness the ritual or have to endure the fear of watching me go through it. Instead, we stayed at my home. Damon had barely left my side since we arrived.

By evening, he stood beside me while the witch prepared the ritual ground inside the room.

His arms were folded across his chest, but I could sense the tension beneath his calm expression. The mate bond between us hummed softly, responding to my unease as if it could feel every fear I

was trying to suppress.

I glanced at Damon, and his eyes immediately found mine.

"You don't have to worry, Damon. I will be fine," I said.

His jaw tightened. "I am not worried."

I raised an eyebrow. "You do know you're my mate, and I can sense how you feel, right?" I teased.

He sighed and crossed the room toward me. "Fine. I'm worried. Happy?"

A faint smile touched my lips. "Of course not. I don't want you to worry."

He stopped in front of me and reached for my hand. His fingers closed around mine, warm and steady. "Whatever happens, I'm staying with you."

I squeezed his hand. "I know."

The witch cleared her throat. "That is enough."

Damon looked toward her. She stood beside the ritual circle, studying me with those ancient,

unreadable eyes.

"If you're ready, we begin."

My stomach tightened. Lydia shifted beneath my skin, her awareness brushing against mine.

We are finally doing this, Aria.

#00

O

Yes, we are, I responded.

The witch had explained the stripping ritual several times. She would remove the magical contamination from my body layer by layer, stripping away everything that did not belong to me so

the deeper corruption could eventually be addressed.

It had sounded simple when she explained it, but now that it was actually about to begin, didn't

seem simple at all.

I stepped forward. Damon immediately moved with me, but the witch raised one hand.

"You cannot cross the boundary once the ritual begins."

His expression hardened. "I'm not leaving her."

"You don't have to leave. You simply cannot interfere."

Damon's eyes narrowed. I turned toward him.

"Damon, I'm going to be fine."

For several seconds, neither of us spoke. Finally, Damon nodded. "I'll be right here."

I stepped into the circle.

The moment my foot crossed the boundary, the air changed. Cold rushed over my body. The candles surrounding me flickered violently, even though there was no wind. The witch began chanting, her ancient words filling the room.

Then I felt the first pulse of magic strike my chest. My entire body jerked. I gasped.

Lydia snarled inside me.

A stronger pulse followed. Pain exploded through my veins, and I dropped to one knee.

“Aria!” Damon’s voice reached me from outside the circle.

“I’m fine!” I forced out through clenched teeth.

The witch’s expression remained focused. “Don’t resist.”

“I’m not!”

“Your wolf is resisting.”

Because she is hurting us, Lydia growled.

I gritted my teeth as the sigils surrounding me began glowing one after another. Golden light spread across the floor before climbing slowly up my legs.

O

Then the pain became unbearable.

It felt as though something was being ripped out of my body from the inside. I screamed.

Damon immediately moved toward the circle. “Stop!”

The witch snapped her head toward him. “Do not cross the boundary!”

“What is happening to her? She looks like she’s in pain!” Damon demanded, panic breaking ough

his usual control.

“Her body is rejecting the ritual!”

My claws suddenly burst from my fingertips. Lydia surged forward, desperate to protect us from the magic tearing through my body.

Let me take control.

No.

Aria!

My vision blurred. The magic crawled higher, burning through my chest and throat. Every breath

became more difficult. I could hear Damon shouting my name, but his voice seemed farther away

with every passing second.

Then my heart stumbled twice. My knees gave out. I hit the floor.

“Aria!”

Everything went black.

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 417

Aria’s POV

For what felt like an eternity, there was nothing.

No sound or pain.

Then I heard a faint growl.

Aria.

I tried to answer, but nothing came.

Aria, wake up.

Lydia’s voice sounded distant, almost lost beneath a thick layer of darkness.

Wake up!

Something slammed into my chest. I gasped as air tore into my lungs, and my eyes flew open.

Damon was kneeling beside me. His face was pale, his fingers pressed against my neck.

“Aria.”

I blinked at him. He looked terrified.

“I’m here,” I whispered.

His hand moved beneath my nose. “She’s breathing,” he said.

The witch was already examining the sigils. “She stopped responding for two minutes.”

Damon’s head snapped toward her. “Two minutes?”

The witch nodded. I reached for Damon’s hand, and he immediately closed his fingers around

mine.

The witch crouched beside the ritual circle and moved three of the stones. She adjusted another sigil before studying the pattern again.

“Her body is rejecting the alignment,” she said. “The array is forcing too much energy through her

wolf at once.”

Lydia growled weakly within me.

The witch stood. “We will continue.”

Damon immediately shook his head. “No.”

< Chapter 417

The witch looked at him. “She has to finish this.”

“She nearly died,” Damon snapped. He lifted his eyes to meet the witch’s.

“That was only because the array was improperly aligned.” Her gaze shifted toward me. “I have

corrected it.”

Damon’s grip tightened around my hand. “Aria.”

I looked at him. He didn’t need to say the rest. I knew exactly what he was asking.

Are you willing to continue?

I looked at the glowing symbols around me, then turned inward.

Lydia was exhausted, but she was still there. I could feel her beneath my skin, battered but

present.

Can we do this?

There was a long silence. Then she answered.

We have survived worse.

A shiver passed through me. She was right.

I slowly nodded. "Let's continue."

The witch resumed the ritual.

This time, the magic came differently. It still hurt. It still felt as though something was clawing its

way through my veins, but the crushing pressure was gone.

I clenched my fists and endured each wave.

Sweat soaked my skin. My breathing became ragged. Damon never moved. Every time my body trembled, his fingers tightened around mine. Every time my breathing faltered, his voice reached

"Stay with me, Aria."

I focused on him, on his voice, on the mate bond connecting us, on Lydia's presence beneath my

skin. Slowly, the golden light began to fade.

The final sigil went dark.

Silence fell over the room.

The witch released a long breath. "It's done."

O

+25 Pointe

I slumped forward, but Damon caught me before I could hit the floor. His arms wrapped around me, pulling me against his chest.

For several seconds, I simply breathed.

The witch watched me carefully. “The first round is complete.”

I lifted my head. “First round?”

She nodded. “There are two more stages.”

My stomach sank.

Damon’s expression immediately darkened, but the witch ignored him.

“Your body needs time to recover before I attempt the second round. One day at minimum. Two would be better.”

I nodded. “Then we’ll wait two days.”

“All right.”

She began gathering some of the ritual materials.

“Do not use your powers unnecessarily. Do not shift. Do not engage in strenuous activity. Your wolf has been heavily taxed.”

Damon helped me stand. My legs trembled beneath me, and he noticed immediately.

“Take it easy.”

I smiled faintly. “I’m fine.”

“You nearly died.”

I looked at him. “That’s not exactly something I can forget.”

His expression softened. “Neither can I.”

That night, I barely slept. My body ached from head to toe, but exhaustion eventually dragged me under.

Then I dreamed.

I was standing somewhere unfamiliar. The place looked like a forest, but it didn't feel like any forest I had ever known. Silver mist curled between ancient trees, and moonlight filtered through branches that seemed impossibly tall.

I looked around. "Where am I?"

O

No answer came. Then I heard footsteps. I turned. A girl stood between the trees.

She looked young, but there was a sadness in her eyes that made my chest tighten. She stared directly at me, yet I couldn't move.

"Who are you?" I asked.

The girl said nothing. Instead, she lifted one hand and pressed it against her chest. Then she

looked at me.

Her lips moved. I couldn't hear the words.

I took a step toward her. "Wait."

She stepped backward and suddenly ran.

I ran after her. The mist swallowed her before I could reach her. I stopped abruptly.

"Come back!"

My voice echoed through the forest. Then I woke.

I shot upright in bed, my heart hammering against my ribs.

I looked around the room. Darkness surrounded me. Damon was asleep beside me, his breathing

slow and steady.

I pressed a hand against my chest.

Lydia stirred. Who is she? I can't remember seeing her before.

I frowned. Neither can I.

I looked toward the window. Moonlight spilled across the floor, but the girl from my dream was

gone.

Still, I couldn't shake the feeling that she had been trying to show me something.

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Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 418

Aria's POV

By morning, I told the witch about the dream. She listened without interrupting. When I finished, she examined me briefly before shaking her head.

"Your body has been severely weakened by the ritual. Hallucinations are not uncommon."

I stared at her.

She turned away and began sorting herbs. Then she glanced at me again.

"Don't let it bother you, Aria."

I nodded slowly. "Okay."

But as I walked away, unease settled deeper in my chest.

Lydia stirred. She doesn't believe us.

No, she doesn't.

Somewhere deep inside me, beneath the exhaustion and pain, I knew one thing for certain.

The dream had not been meaningless.

The next day, the working began again. I had barely recovered from the first round, but the

witch insisted that waiting too long would make the next stage more difficult.

My body was still sore, and every muscle felt heavy, yet I stepped into the ritual room anyway.

I kept what the witch had told me from Damon because I didn't want him to worry or try to

stop us. I knew he would object if he discovered that I was beginning the second stage so soon, and I couldn't afford to lose more time.

When I entered the room, I saw Noah standing near the far side, and my brows drew together.

I hadn't expected him to be there.

He noticed my reaction but said nothing. He only gave me a faint smile.

Apparently, the witch had allowed him inside because she believed I needed a support system during the ritual. Since I didn't want Damon to know what was happening, Noah had

been the only other suitable option.

The witch stood beside the ritual array. "Once we begin, there will be no stopping unless your

body completely fails," she said.

I stared at her. "That's comforting."

She didn't smile. "This stage will be more painful than the last."

Lydia stirred uneasily. I don't like this.

Neither do I.

Unfortunately, we have to do it. I can't wait for all of this to end.

I took a slow breath. Me too.

Lydia growled softly inside me. I know.

I stepped into the circle. The witch raised her hands. The candles ignited simultaneously, and

the entire room changed instantly. The air grew thick with magic, pressing against my skin

before a powerful force slammed into my body.

I doubled over.

A scream tore from my throat as pain ripped through me with such force that my claws emerged involuntarily. My wolf surged beneath my skin, fighting against the invisible force

moving through us.

Aria! It's worse.

I know.

Another wave hit. My knees buckled, and I barely managed to remain upright. Outside the circle, Noah's hands curled into fists.

"How long will this take?" he asked.

"As long as it takes."

"That's not an answer."

The witch ignored him. The sigils began glowing brighter, their light spreading across the floor and climbing around my body. I felt something moving through my veins, scraping against the remnants of magic buried deep inside me.

It felt as though someone had reached inside my body and was tearing apart every thread holding me together.

I screamed again.

"Aria!" Noah's voice cut through the pain.

I tried to focus on him. His voice. His scent. Anything that could keep me anchored.

But the pain kept rising. My vision blurred. The room spun around me.

Stay awake, Lydia's voice sounded strained.

I'm trying.

Please, don't let go.

I clenched my teeth. "I won't."

+25 Ponto

The words barely escaped my lips. Then another surge of magic struck me. My heart seemed

to stop.

Everything went black.

"Aria!"

Someone was calling my name. I couldn't move. I couldn't breathe.

"Aria, open your eyes!"

The voice sounded distant. It was Noah.

I tried to reach for the voice, but my body felt impossibly heavy, as though I had been buried

beneath the earth.

"Aria, listen to me. Come back."

His voice became louder.

"Don't you dare give up."

Something warm closed around my hand. I felt his fingers tightening around mine. "Aria!"

My lungs suddenly dragged in a breath. I gasped. My eyes flew open.

Noah was leaning over me. His expression was tense, his hand still wrapped around mine.

"There you are."

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+25 Ports

I stared at him, struggling to understand what had happened. I tried to sit up, but Noah immediately stopped me.

“Don’t. Stay down.”

His voice was firm. I swallowed and looked around. The witch was still working. The ritual

wasn’t over.

Fear slammed into me. “What happened?”

“You lost consciousness for a while.”

It happened again. The realization sent a cold shiver through me.

The witch suddenly shouted, “Don’t move!”

I froze.

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Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 419

Aria’s POV

The sigils around me flared. Pain exploded through my body again, and I cried out.

Noah tightened his grip on my hand. “Look at me.”

I forced my eyes toward him.

“Stay with me, Aria.”

My breathing became ragged. “I don’t think I can do this.”

His expression softened. “You can.”

The ritual shook the room. The windows rattled violently, and the candles flickered wildly as

the magic surged through the circle.

Lydia snarled. We can survive this.

I clung to her voice. The pain became almost unbearable. Tears slipped down my cheeks, but

Noah didn't let go.

"That's it," he murmured. "Keep breathing."

I sucked in another breath. Then another. Slowly, the pressure began to fade. The glowing sigils dimmed one after another.

The witch finally lowered her hands. "It's done."

My body went completely limp. Noah caught my hand before it slipped from his couldn't even lift my head.

At that moment, the door burst open.

grasp.

Damon rushed into the room, his expression filled with confusion and alarm. "Aria."

He was beside me instantly. His hand went to my face. "What happened?"

I tried to answer, but my throat felt raw. "I'm okay."

Damon lifted his face toward the witch. "You said she needed to rest for two days! Why did

you go ahead with it today without informing me?"

His Alpha aura shook the room.

The witch remained calm as she explained the urgency of the second stage and why delaying it could have made the ritual more dangerous.

I swallowed and looked at Damon. "It was me. I kept it from you."

His expression tightened. "You shouldn't have done that, Aria. I want to be here for you throughout this journey."

I closed my eyes for a moment. "I didn't want you to worry or prevent the second ritual from happening today."

I let out a tired sigh. "I'm sorry."

His anger softened almost immediately. His thumb brushed gently across my cheek. "It's okay. You don't need to apologize."

Before I could answer, the witch spoke. "She needs rest."

Damon nodded.

Noah slowly released my hand. I felt his fingers linger for a second before he stepped away.

My eyes followed him.

He looked at me. "You did well."

I managed to whisper, "Thank you."

He gave me a faint nod before walking toward the door.

Damon's expression changed as he followed Noah with his eyes.

Later, I was lying in bed when I heard voices outside. They belonged to Damon and Noah. I

was too exhausted to move, but their voices reached me.

I frowned.

Lydia stirred. They're arguing.

I can hear them.

I tried to sit up, but my body refused to cooperate.

Through the slightly open door, I saw Damon step directly into Noah's path.

"You didn't need to be that close to Aria in there."

+25 Point#

Noah stopped. His expression remained calm. "I only did what I ought to do. She needed someone to keep her anchored."

Damon's eyes hardened. "Whatever you think you're doing, stay away from her."

Noah's jaw tightened. "You're not the only person who cares about Aria."

The air between them became heavy. Both of their Alpha instincts stirred. Damon's aura pushed against Noah's, and the pressure of their opposing dominance filled the hallway.

Noah didn't retreat.

For a moment, I could feel the tension even through the mate bond. But neither man moved.

I knew it was because of me. They didn't want to cause a serious disturbance while I was recovering.

Damon's voice dropped into a dangerous growl.

"Don't test me."

Noah stared at him. "I'm not testing you. I'm doing what I came here to do."

Damon's expression became colder. "What do you mean by that?"

Noah paused. Then he stepped closer.

"Sooner or later, I'll be with Aria."

There was silence. Damon's entire body went still.

Even from inside the room, I felt the shift in his presence through the mate bond. His anger

surged so sharply that my wolf stirred in response.

Noah walked past him.

Damon slowly turned his head. “What did you say?”

Noah didn’t stop. “You heard me.”

Damon’s hands curled into fists as he watched Noah walk away.

I stared through the gap in the door, my heart pounding.

Noah’s words echoed inside my head.

Sooner or later, I’ll be with Aria.

In that moment, I couldn’t shake the uneasy feeling that Noah might be planning something.

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 420

Aria’s POV

+25 Pon

By the third day, I was beginning to wonder if my body would ever feel like mine again. The ritual room was silent except for the crackling of the candles...

I stood inside the circle, breathing heavily as the last traces of magic faded from my skin. Sweat dampened my hair, and my muscles trembled from exhaustion, but something felt different. I felt lighter. I didn’t feel that foreign darkness moving beneath my skin anymore.

The witch slowly lowered her hands. “It’s done.”

I stared at her. “Done?”

She nodded. “The stripping has gone very well. The vampire bloodline within you has been thoroughly cleared.”

My heart skipped. I almost didn’t believe her. “It’s gone forever?”

“Yes.”

I closed my eyes.

Lydia stirred inside me. It's quiet.

I focused inward. She was right. The strange pressure that had plagued us was gone.

I let out a shaky breath. "We're free."

We're free, Lydia echoed.

A laugh escaped me. It was the first genuine laugh I'd managed in days.

Damon stepped forward the moment the witch gave him permission. I wrapped my arms around him.

"It's finally over," he breathed. His arms tightened around me.

"Yes, it is." I smiled against his shoulder.

He exhaled deeply, and I felt some of the tension leave his body.

Rhein's presence brushed against the bond. She's safe.

She is, Damon answered silently.

I pulled away enough to look at him. His eyes were shining with relief. "I thought this day would never

come."

"So did I."

He brushed a strand of hair away from my face. "You scared me too many times."

I gave him a tired smile. "I know."

Shapley 420.

He shook his head, but a smile finally appeared. I leaned into him. For once, I didn't feel like I was waiting for the next disaster. I felt normal.

The witch began gathering the ritual items. "You should not assume this means you can return to your normal routine immediately."

My smile faded. "What do you mean?"

“The stripping is complete, but your body has endured considerable strain. I need to monitor you.”

I frowned. “For how long?”

“A few more days.”

I glanced at Damon. “We can stay tonight, then go to the old Grayson estate tomorrow.”

The witch shook her head. “Tonight will not be enough. You need to stay for several days.”

My shoulders dropped. “But I feel fine.”

“You feel relieved. That is not the same thing.”

Damon gave me a knowing look.

I frowned at him. “Don’t agree with her.”

He smiled. “If she says she needs to monitor you for a few days, then that’s what we should do, Aria.”

I crossed my arms. “I want to go and see Elona.”

Just thinking about my daughter made my chest ache. “I’ve been away from her too long.”

Damon’s gaze warmed. “I know, and we will do that when the time is right.”

I heaved a sigh.

He chuckled. “Don’t worry, you’ll survive.”

That evening, Damon and I stayed together in my room. We celebrated my freedom from the vampire bloodline. We ate, drank, and talked about a lot of things.

I soon fell asleep beside Damon. At first, everything was peaceful. Then I found myself standing in the strange forest again. Silver mist covered the ground. The ancient trees stretched toward the sky. My heart began beating faster.

I looked around. “I know this place.”

The same feeling crawled over my skin. Someone was watching me.

Lydia stirred. She’s here.

I froze. Who?

The girl.

A soft sound came from behind me. I turned. The girl stood between the trees. The same girl from before.

+25 Powis

She looked exactly as she had in my previous dream. Young, pale, and silent.

She was watching me.

My pulse quickened. "Who are you?"

She didn't answer. I took a step toward her.

"Why do you keep appearing to me?"

She remained still.

I took another step. "Are you trying to tell me something?"

Her lips parted, but I still couldn't hear a word.

The forest suddenly shook. The mist surged between us. I reached for her.

"Wait!"

She disappeared.

I woke abruptly. My chest rose and fell rapidly. Damon was still asleep beside me. I stared into the darkness.

Lydia was silent. Then, slowly, she spoke.

Aria, that wasn't a normal dream.

I swallowed. "No, it wasn't."

I looked toward the window. Moonlight spilled across the floor. Who was this girl, and why did she keep appearing to me?

Cars 421

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 421

Aria's POV

The next few days passed slowly. The witch continued monitoring me, checking my pulse, my eyes, my breathing, and even my wolf's condition. Every time she examined me, she gave me the same answer.

"You are recovering well."

But I wasn't convinced. Because every night, the girl returned. The first night, she had stood beneath the trees. The second night, she had been closer. The third night, I could see her face clearly. And by the fourth night, I could hear her voice.

I stood in the same strange forest, surrounded by silver mist. The girl was standing only a few steps away from me.

"Who are you?" I asked.

Her lips moved. I strained to hear her.

"Aria..."

My heart jumped. "What?"

She spoke again, but her voice dissolved beneath a strange rushing sound. I stepped closer.

"Say it again."

Her expression changed. Fear flashed across her face. Then she looked over my shoulder. I turned. There was nothing there. When I looked back, she was gone.

I woke with a gasp.

Lydia immediately stirred. She is trying to tell us something. I can feel it.

I sat up slowly. For several seconds, I stared into the darkness. "I know."

I didn't tell Damon because I didn't know exactly what to tell him. That I kept dreaming about a girl I'd never met? That the girl somehow knew my name? It sounded insane. So I kept it to myself until the dreams began following me into the day.

It happened while I was having breakfast with Damon. I was halfway through telling him about Elona when the words suddenly disappeared from my mind.

“I was thinking that when we go to the Old Grayson estate, we should probably...”

I stopped. My eyes fixed on the wall behind Damon. I lost my train of thought.

“Aria?”

I didn’t answer.

Damon turned in his chair. “What are you looking at?”

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I blinked again. “Nothing.”

His eyes narrowed. “You stopped talking.”

“I forgot what I was saying.”

His brows furrowed with concern. “That is not the first time this has happened.”

I forced a smile. “I know. I’m just tired, that’s all.”

Damon studied me. The Alpha in him was too observant for my liking. “Are you sure?”

I nodded. “Yes.”

His gaze remained fixed on me. “Does something still feel wrong?”

My stomach tightened. For a moment, I considered telling him everything. But what would I say?

+25 Poms

The treatment was supposed to have removed the vampire blood from my body. The witch had said it had gone perfectly. Maybe this was simply what recovery looked like. So I nodded.

“No, it’s just the recovery period.”

Damon didn’t look convinced. “Are you having headaches? Do you feel pain?”

“Not really.”

His eyes softened slightly. “Then why are you spacing out?”

I looked down at my plate. “I don’t know. I’m probably still exhausted.”

Damon reached across the table and took my hand. “You don’t have to hide anything from me.”

The warmth of the mate bond spread through me. I squeezed his fingers. “I’m not hiding anything.”

The lie tasted bitter.

Lydia stirred. We are hiding something.

I know.

You should tell him.

Not until we know what it is.

Lydia reluctantly fell silent. Damon continued watching me.

Finally, he sighed. “Fine.”

I gave him a grateful smile. But the moment he looked away, my gaze drifted toward the window again. I couldn’t stop thinking about the girl.

The episodes became more frequent. Sometimes I would be walking down the hallway and suddenly stop. Sometimes someone would speak to me, and I would realize several seconds later that I hadn’t heard a word.

Once I found myself standing in the garden with my hand pressed against a tree. I didn’t even remember walking there.

“Aria?”

I spun around. Damon stood several feet away. His brows were drawn together. “What are you doing?”

I looked at my hand. “I...”

I couldn’t answer. For a second, I had the strangest feeling that the tree had been calling me.

I pulled my hand away from the tree.

Damon walked toward me. “You’re doing it again.” He stopped in front of me. “Where does your mind go?”

I looked away. “I don’t know.”

He gently lifted my chin. “Aria.” His voice softened. “If something is happening, tell me.”

I wanted to. But fear stopped me. Because I was beginning to suspect the problem wasn’t simply inside my head. The treatment had supposedly removed the vampire bloodline. So why was I seeing things that weren’t there?

Why was Lydia sensing them too? And why did the girl from my dreams feel more real every night?

What if the witch was wrong about my recovery? I decided not to rely on her to tell me what was happening. I needed answers, my own answers.

I needed to know what had really happened during that ritual, and I needed to find out who that girl was. I made my decision. I would investigate everything myself.

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 422

Aria’s POV

The side effects didn’t get better. They got worse.

At first, the strange spells lasted only a few seconds. Then they stretched into minutes,

Sometimes I would be walking through the house and suddenly feel the world around me blur. The walls would fade. The voices around me would become distant, and she would appear... the girl from my dreams.

She didn’t appear clearly or completely. I would see her standing at the edge of my vision. Her pale figure, long hair, and sad eyes. Every time I blinked, she disappeared.

Soon, I started to feel her. Her emotions would hit me without warning. Sorrow, anger, fear, and an

overwhelming longing. It was as though she wanted to go home.

I didn’t understand why I could feel her emotions so clearly. I didn’t even know her. Yet whenever

she appeared, something inside my chest tightened as if her pain belonged to me.

One afternoon, I was walking down the hallway when it happened again. I stopped. The girl stood

at the end of the corridor. She was facing me. I froze.

This time, I could see the outline of her body clearly. Her head was lowered. Her shoulders

trembled, and I felt her sorrow crash into me. My chest tightened.

The girl lifted her head. Her face remained blurred. She raised one hand toward me. I took a step

forward.

“Who are you?”

She didn’t answer. Instead, the image flickered. Then she vanished.

I stood there alone. My breathing was uneven.

Lydia was restless. She looks like she’s trapped.

I swallowed. “Trapped where?”

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

That frightened me more than anything.

Damon had also started watching me constantly. He noticed every pause, every distant look, every time my eyes followed something he couldn’t see. That evening, he found me sitting in the living

room, staring at nothing.

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He crouched in front of me. “Aria.”

blinked. His face came back into focus. “Yes?”

His eyes searched mine. "I can tell something is wrong with you. What is happening?"

I looked away. "I told you. It's part of the recovery process. The witch confirmed it."

Damon didn't look convinced. I looked at him. "Don't worry. I am fine."

Damon held my gaze for a long moment. Finally, he stood. "All right. If you need me, call."

"I will."

He walked away. I watched him disappear through the doorway. Then I glanced toward the corridor. The witch's room was empty. She had gone outside earlier to gather some herbs.

An idea immediately formed in my mind. I shouldn't have been thinking it, but I couldn't stop myself. I needed to see if I could find clues that would explain what was happening to me.

Lydia stirred. If she finds out we went

Probably not.

to her room in her absence, she won't like it.

Lydia was silent for a moment. Let's do it a

I almost smiled. Agreed.

anyway.

I slipped into the witch's room. The moment I entered, the scent of herbs and old magic filled my

nose. The walls were covered with shelves containing bottles, books, dried plants, and strange

objects I couldn't identify. I closed the door behind me.

My wolf sharpened my senses. Be careful.

I am.

I began searching. I opened drawers. Nothing. I checked the shelves. There was nothing.

I pulled open another drawer. It was empty. I was about to close it when I noticed something

beneath a folded piece of cloth.

It was a photograph. My heart skipped. I pulled it out. Dust covered the edges. I wiped it clean with

my thumb.

Then I froze. The room seemed to disappear around me.

The girl. It was her. The same girl who had been appearing in my dreams. The same girl I had seen standing in the hallway. She was smiling in the photograph. She looked younger, happier, and alive.

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My fingers tightened around the photograph. “No...”

Lydia went completely still. That’s her.

Yes.

My heart hammered. I turned the photograph over. There was writing on the back. A name and a

date. I read the words slowly. My blood ran cold. The name belonged to the girl, and beneath it

was a date, a date from years ago. I stared at it, trying to make sense of what I was seeing.

Then another realization struck me. The girl wasn’t some random spirit. She wasn’t an illusion

created by my weakened mind. She had existed.

I turned the photograph over again. The witch had been standing beside the girl. Her arm was

wrapped around her shoulders. They looked like mother and daughter.

My breath caught.

“She’s the witch’s daughter.”

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Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 423

Aria's POV

I didn't wait for the witch to come to me.

+25 Pointe

The moment I left the room, I went straight to where I knew I would find her, the photograph clenched so tightly in my hand that the edges dug into my palm. My heart hammered against my ribs, and Lydia paced restlessly inside me, her unease mirroring my own.

I followed the faint scent of herbs until I reached the ritual room.

The witch stood beside a long wooden table, carefully sorting dried herbs into small bowls.

She looked up when I entered. Then her eyes fell on the photograph in my hand. The color drained from her face. Her fingers went still.

For several seconds, neither of us spoke.

I raised the photograph between us. "Who is she?"

The witch stared at it as though she has

Finally, her shoulders sagged. "You found

seen a ghost.

The calmness in her voice made my anger burn hotter.

I stepped closer. "She's your daughter."

The witch closed her eyes. "Yes."

That single word seemed to drain whatever strength she had left. I stared at her, struggling to

understand how she could have kept something like this from me.

“Why didn’t you tell me?” I demanded. “I described the young woman I kept seeing in my dreams. I told you exactly what she looked like. You knew she was your daughter, so why didn’t you say

anything?”

My voice rose. “Why?”

The witch looked away. “Because I knew you would ask questions I wasn’t ready to answer.”

A bitter laugh escaped me. I walked to the table and slammed the photograph onto it.

“You will answer them now.”

Her gaze dropped to the picture.

“Why have I been seeing her?”

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The witch’s jaw tightened. “I can explain.”

folded my arms across my chest. “I am listening.”

She remained silent for several heartbeats before finally releasing a shaky breath. “When the

vampires took me, they struck a deal with me.”

My stomach tightened. “What kind of deal?”

“They promised that if I helped them get you, they would help me bring my daughter back to fe.”

A chill moved down my spine. For a moment, I simply stared at her.

“Your dead daughter?”

The witch nodded.

My disbelief quickly turned into fury. “How could you?”

She flinched.

“But you told me you were stripping the vampire bloodline from me.”

The witch lowered her head. “I lied.”

My heart dropped.

Inside me, Lydia snarled. She betrayed us.

“You lied to me?”

The witch nodded slowly. “I had no choice.”

“Everyone has a choice.”

Her eyes filled with tears. “Not when they have already taken everything from you.” Her voice trembled. “They took my only child. Then they came to me and promised they could give her back.”

I stared at her in disbelief. “You believed them?”

“I knew it was impossible.”

“Then why did you do it?”

Tears slipped down her cheeks. “Because knowing something is impossible doesn’t stop you from wanting it.” Her voice cracked. “I knew my daughter was dead. I buried her myself. I watched the earth cover her body. I knew there was nothing left for me to bring back.”

She pressed a trembling hand against her chest. “But when they told me I could see her again,

even for a moment, I stopped thinking clearly.”

O

I swallowed hard. The anger inside me hadn’t disappeared, but pity had entered too, and somehow, that made everything worse.

I looked at the photograph again before turning back to her. “If you didn’t strip the vampire bloodline from my body, what exactly did you do to me?”

The witch hesitated. “I altered the working.”

My heartbeat quickened. “What does that mean?”

“I changed the ritual.” She took a slow breath. “I ripened the vampire bloodline inside you, pushing it

to the brink of completion. I made it dormant enough that your body wouldn’t immediately reject it, but active enough that the turning could be completed.”

My breath caught. “You’ve been preparing me to become a vampire.”

The witch nodded. “The bloodline is ready to take over now.”

A cold sensation swept through my body.

Lydia went completely still. Then she snarled. Aria.

I felt it too. Something was wrong. A strange heat suddenly spread through my veins. I looked

down at my hands. They were trembling.

“No.”

The witch’s expression changed. “Aria... stay calm.”

“Don’t tell me to stay calm!”

The heat intensified. It moved through my arms, across my chest, and down my spine. My heart

suddenly slammed against my ribs.

Then pain exploded through my chest. I gasped and grabbed the edge of the table to keep myself

upright.

Lydia cried out inside my mind. Something is happening!

“I can’t...”

My knees buckled.

The witch rushed toward me. “Don’t fight it!”

I shoved her away. “Get away from me!”

My vision blurred.

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The room twisted around me. Every sound became distorted. I could hear my heartbeat pounding

inside my ears, faster and louder with every second.

Then something sharp pushed painfully against my gums. I cried out. My fangs were changing

They lengthened rapidly, the pressure sending another wave of pain through my jaw.

“No!”

My fingers curled involuntarily. Claws pierced through my fingertips. I stared at them in horror

“This isn’t happening.”

H

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 424

Aria’s POV

Lydia surged forward. Let me out!

I gritted my teeth. I can’t control it!

My skin burned. It felt as though fire had entered my veins, racing through my body and consuming everything in its path.

The witch stood several feet away, staring at me in horror. “I didn’t expect it to activate this soon.”

I glared at her through the haze. “You did this.”

“I know!” Her voice broke. “I know!”

Another wave of pain ripped through me. I screamed. The sound barely sounded human.

Something was changing inside me. I could feel it. My senses sharpened until every scent in the

room became overwhelming. I could smell the herbs on the table, the witch's fear, and blood.

My stomach turned.

Lydia fought against the darkness spreading through my mind. Aria! Stay with me!

I'm trying.

Don't let it take me.

I wanted to answer her. I wanted to tell her I wouldn't. But my thoughts were already beginning to

scatter. The walls blurred. The floor seemed to tilt beneath me.

Somewhere beyond the ritual room, I heard a voice. "Aria!"

Damon. My heart clenched at the sound of his voice.

"Damon..." I tried to call his name, but my throat refused to cooperate.

He sounded so far away. I tried to move toward him. My body wouldn't obey. My legs gave out

completely.

The witch rushed toward me, but I barely registered her anymore. The darkness was spreading

through my mind.

My body no longer felt like mine. I tried to fight it.

I tried to reach for Lydia, but even she was beginning to fade.

<Chapter 424

Aria...

Lydia, stay with me.

I'm here. Her voice became weaker.

Then my vision narrowed until all I could see was darkness around the edges.

The last thing I saw was the witch reaching for me, then everything inside me went dark.

I couldn't feel the floor beneath me. I couldn't feel my hands. I couldn't even tell if I was breathing.

There was only the sound of a voice somewhere in the distance.

"Elena."

The name echoed through the darkness again.

"Elena, my child."

It was the witch. She was calling her daughter's name. I tried to open my eyes, but I couldn't. My

mind felt like it was being pulled in different directions.

Then something inside me snapped. Pain exploded through every part of my body. I screamed.

My back arched as something ancient and powerful surged through my veins. It wasn't Lydia. It

was something colder and darker. Something that wanted to consume everything inside me.

Aria! Lydia's voice echoed through my mind. Fight it!

I tried. I fought with everything I had. But the vampire bloodline had already been pushed too far. It

awakened completely.

My heartbeat changed. My senses sharpened. Every sound became painfully clear. I could hear the witch's breathing. I could hear footsteps outside. I could hear someone's heart pounding

somewhere down the hall. Then I heard another sound. Damon. My mate.

"Aria!"

His voice should have anchored me. Instead, it became distant. The darkness swallowed it.

I felt Lydia clawing desperately against the transformation.

Don't let it take me.

I'm trying.

Aria! Her voice cracked. Then something tore through my mind. A final surge of power rushed

through my body. My wolf screamed and disappeared.

{”

Silence followed. Absolute silence.

Sound returned first. Muffled, far away, like it was pushing through water. Then a voice, sharp with urgency, closer now, words breaking apart before I could hold onto them.

Then light. Cold air against my skin. A floor beneath me.

My fingers twitched. My eyes opened.

Everything came into focus at once. A room. Two men standing over me, close enough that I

could feel the heat rolling off them. A woman near a table, frozen in place. Heartbeats, three of them, hammering at different speeds.

One of the men dropped to his knees beside me. “Aria.”

I flinched back from him. His touch felt unfamiliar. Whatever that name meant, it didn't feel like

mine.

I stared at him. “Who are you?”

He went completely still.

E

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 425

Aria's POV

The other one's eyes narrowed. "Aria?"

I looked at him too. I didn't know him either. "Who are you?"

His face crumpled for a fraction of a second before he forced himself to remain calm. "It's me." He

stepped closer. "I'm Damon."

The name meant nothing. I tilted my head. "Damon?"

He nodded. "Yes."

I searched my mind. There was nothing. No memories, no connection, no recognition. Just an

empty space.

I looked at the second man. "And him?"

"He is Noah."

I stared at him. There was nothing.

The woman's voice came from behind me. "Her memories..." She sounded horrified.

"What about them?" Damon demanded.

"They're gone."

Damon stared at me.

"No." The word came out barely above a whisper.

I looked between them. Why were they looking at me like I was someone they loved? I didn't

understand.

I stood. My legs should have been weak. Instead, I felt stronger than I had ever felt. The room

suddenly seemed too small. I could hear everything. Every heartbeat, every breath, every movement. Then I smelled blood.

My head snapped toward the woman. She had cut her finger on one of the ritual stones. A single

drop of blood ran down her skin. My fangs descended instantly. Hunger tore through me. I stared

at the blood. My body reacted before my mind could. I took one step toward her.

She stumbled backward. Damon moved between us. "Aria."

I looked at him. His scent was strange. Yet something about him irritated me. "Move out of my

J

< Chapter 425

way."

His expression broke. "You don't mean that."

"I don't know who you are."

He shook his head. "You do." His eyes glistened. "You are my mate."

The word meant nothing to me. "Mate?"

Damon nodded. "You are my fated mate."

I stared at him. There should have been something. A spark, a pull, a recognition. Anything at all but there was nothing.

I looked down at my hands. My skin was pale. My nails were sharp. I touched my lips and felt the

tips of my fangs. "What am I?"

The woman closed her eyes. "You are a vampire."

I stared at her. The word felt familiar. It was the only thing my mind seemed to understand.

“A vampire.” I repeated it quietly.

Damon stepped toward me. “You are more than that.”

I looked at him. “Am I?”

“Yes.” His voice broke. “You are Aria Grayson. You are a werewolf. You’re my mate, the mother of

our child. You’re the Alpha of the Grayson Pack.”

I stared at him. Those words meant nothing to me. Werewolf, mate, mother, Alpha, Grayson Pack. They were simply sounds.

I shook my head. “I don’t know what you are talking about.”

Damon looked like I’d struck him. Noah remained silent, but his eyes were fixed on me.

I turned toward him. “You said your name was Noah.”

“Yes.”

“Why are you here?”

His jaw tightened. “I came because I was worried about you.”

I studied him. “Why would you be worried about me?”

He didn’t answer immediately. Damon’s gaze sharpened.

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Noah finally said, “Because you’re important to me.”

frowned. I didn’t understand. Nothing about either of them felt familiar. I looked around the room. Then I looked at my reflection in the dark window.

Deep red eyes stared back at me. I touched my face. The woman in the reflection looked like me. But I couldn’t remember being her.

I turned back toward them. “I am a vampire.”

Damon stepped closer. “Aria...”

I raised my hand. “Don’t.”

He stopped. I could see the pain in his eyes. I didn’t understand why it bothered me. I didn’t know him. I didn’t know Noah. I didn’t know the woman. I didn’t know this place. I didn’t know anything. Except one thing.

I was a vampire, and whatever life these strangers claimed I had lived before, I couldn’t remember

any of it.

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Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 426

+25 Paints

Damon’s POV

Aria stood apart from us, pale and unreadable, her red eyes fixed on nothing in particular. She

didn’t know who we were. She didn’t know who I was. She had completely lost her memory.

Whatever part of Aria had remained after becoming a vampire was buried so deeply that I couldn’t reach her.

I took a slow step toward her, desperate to try again. Maybe if I spoke to her, reminded her of something only we could share, she might remember. Maybe the mate bond was still buried

somewhere beneath the darkness.

I opened my mouth, but before I could say anything, a commotion erupted outside. Roars.

Howls. The unmistakable sounds of bodies colliding and claws tearing through flesh.

Rhein lifted his head sharply inside me.

Vampires.

Noah heard it too. His head snapped toward the door, his expression hardening. “They’ve come in their numbers.”

I was already moving.

We rushed outside, and the sight that greeted me made my stomach twist. Grayson warriors

were fighting throughout the compound, surrounded by dozens of vampires.

The creatures moved with unnatural precision, their pale faces expressionless and their red eyes glowing beneath the moonlight. There was nothing human left in them.

At the centre of the chaos stood a vampire who carried himself differently from the others.

He didn’t need to shout orders. The others simply moved around him, responding to his presence as though his command was instinct.

Then his gaze found me. Then it passed over me and settled on Aria. She had followed us outside.

The moment she saw the vampires, something changed in her expression. She stared at them as though she were looking at her own reflection. The same pale skin. The same re

+25 Paints

eyes. The same unnatural stillness.

“Aria.” My voice cracked around her name. I stepped in front of her. “Get behind me.”

She didn’t move. She didn’t come toward me, but she didn’t move away either. She simply stared at them.

The vampire at the centre smiled. “She belongs with us now.”

My claws pushed through my fingertips. “She belongs nowhere without my say.”

Kill them, Rhein snarled inside me. Before they take her.

I know.

I lunged. The nearest vampire met me halfway. I ducked beneath his strike and drove my fist

into his ribs. I felt something c***k, but he barely reacted. Before he could recover, I grabbed

him by the throat and threw him aside.

Another came from my left. I caught his wrist, twisted hard, and slammed him into the ground. Three more immediately closed in.

“Move!” My Alpha command ripped through the clearing. For a heartbeat, the surrounding wolves hesitated. The vampires didn’t.

One of them smiled. “We don’t answer to you.”

He attacked. I met him head-on, my claws tearing across his chest. He staggered backward,

but another vampire struck me from behind. The impact drove me to one knee.

I snarled and spun, grabbing him by the throat before slamming him into the dirt. But that second was enough. By the time I got back to my feet, the vampires had already begun closing the distance to Aria.

She still hadn’t run.

“Aria!” I shouted. “Move!”

Her red eyes slowly found mine. There was no recognition in them. No warmth. No bond. She

looked at me the way a stranger looked at someone shouting at her for a reason she couldn’t

understand.

My chest tightened. “Aria, fight them!”

Chap 426

+25 Pop’s

One of the pale figures reached for her. She let him. She didn't flinch. She didn't pull away. She

simply allowed him to take her hand.

"No." The word tore out of me. I broke through the line of vampires, fighting my way toward

her. She was only a few steps away. I reached out. My fingers nearly closed around her arm.

Then something slammed into my side. I stumbled. A body crashed into the space between

"Noah." He had been holding the other flank, but now he staggered into my path, blood soaking through his shirt. His face twisted in pain. A vampire stood behind him, its claws buried deep in his side.

"Noah!"

He dropped to one knee. The vampire ripped its claws free. Noah's hand pressed against the

wound as blood spilled between his fingers.

"Get Aria," he rasped. Then he collapsed.

Something inside me shattered. "NOAH!"

I turned toward the vampire responsible. My vision blurred with rage. I lunged, caught it by

the throat, and drove it backward with enough force to send both of us crashing through what remained of a stone wall. I didn't think. I didn't hold back.

I fought with everything I had left, claws tearing through flesh, my wolf roaring beneath my

skin.

But when I finally looked up, my heart stopped. Most of our warriors were down. The remaining vampires were already retreating toward the tree line, and Aria was with them.

She walked between the vampires, small and pale among their bodies. She didn't look back,

not once.

"ARIA!" My voice echoed across the compound.

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 427

Damon's POV

Aria didn't stop.

I reached for the mate bond. Aria!

There was nothing.

I pushed harder. Aria, please.

There was silence. It was as though the bond had never existed, as though I had imagined every moment of it. It felt like reaching for a hand that had never been there to begin with.

Rhein whimpered inside me. We need to go after them. We need to bring back our mate.

I ran. A vampire turned and struck me hard enough to send me crashing against a tree trunk.

Pain shot through my ribs, but I forced myself upright. Another vampire came at me. I caught

it, threw it aside, and kept running. I broke through the tree line.

There was no one there. They were gone. So was she.

I stood there in the darkness, breathing heavily, staring into the forest as if I could somehow

force her to appear. She didn't.

Behind me, the compound had already dissolved into chaos. Justin was shouting for a

healer. Wounded warriors were being dragged from the battlefield.

Bodies were being lifted from the ground. Noah's blood stained the earth where he had fallen. Everything that had happened here was already becoming aftermath.

The attack was over. The vampires were gone. Our warriors had survived or fallen. But Aria

hadn't come back.

I stood in the middle of it all, unable to move. My place hadn't changed. The world around me hadn't changed. There was simply no longer anyone standing across from me.

I understood at that moment what it meant to lose someone who was still alive.

Aria's POV

Cold was the first thing I felt when I opened my eyes.

Not the cold of winter or the chill of the night. This was different. It seeped deep into my bones, heavy and unnatural, as though the air itself had been drained of every trace of warmth.

I tried to move, but pain shot through my body. A groan escaped my lips as I forced my eyes

fully open.

Dark stones surrounded me.

I was lying on a large bed inside a room I didn't recognize. Black curtains covered the tall windows, blocking out whatever lay beyond them.

Strange symbols had been carved into the walls, their patterns twisting around one another

in a language I couldn't understand. Silver candles burned in iron holders, their flames flickering steadily without giving off even the slightest warmth.

Where was I?

I pushed myself upright, immediately regretting the movement when a sharp ache exploded

through my head. I pressed a hand against my temple and closed my eyes, trying to steady myself.

I searched for something, anything, that might help me understand. A face, a name, or at least a single memory that belonged to me.

There was nothing. Just an empty, aching space where an entire life should have been.

The door suddenly opened.

I looked up sharply.

An elderly man entered the room, dressed in a long black robe that swept against the stone

floor. His skin was so pale it looked almost translucent beneath the candlelight, and his eyes

were an unnatural shade of crimson.

Two vampires followed closely behind him. The moment I saw them, something inside me recoiled.

They screamed danger. I didn't know how I knew it, but every instinct in my body scream the same warning.

I pulled the blanket tighter around myself.

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“Who are you?”

The old man stopped several feet away, studying me with unsettling calm.

“I am the Elder of this clan.”

I frowned. “This clan?”

A faint smile touched his lips. “Your clan.”

I stared at him, confusion tightening my chest. “What are you talking about?”

He walked closer, his gaze moving over my face as though he were examining something precious. “You don’t remember.”

It wasn’t a question.

I slowly shook my head. “I don’t remember anything.”

He studied me for a long moment, as though trying to determine just how much of me had been lost. “Nothing at all?”

“No faces. No names.” My voice cracked as I struggled to speak. “Nothing.”

Something shifted in his expression. It seemed like relief, and for some reason, it made my

stomach twist.

“Then we will begin at the beginning,” he said.

I stared at him. “Beginning of what?”

“Of who you are.” He stepped closer. “You have been deceived for a very long time, Countess.”

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 428

Aria’s POV

My brows drew together. “Countess?”

He nodded. “Yes. You are not an ordinary vampire.”

The words made my heart pound. “I don’t understand.”

“You possess ancient vampire power.”

I stared at him in disbelief. “I have ancient vampire power?”

“Yes, you do.”

He raised one hand. The candles surrounding the room suddenly flared. Their flames transformed from silver-white to crimson, bathing the chamber in an eerie red glow.

A pulse of energy swept through the room. I gasped. Something stirred beneath my skin. Power. It moved through my veins like a current, unfamiliar and terrifying, yet at the same

time, there was something disturbingly natural about it.

As though it had always belonged to me. As though my body recognized it even if didn't.

The Elder watched my reaction with clear satisfaction.

my mind

“You carry the blood of an ancient vampire line,” he said. “A bloodline that existed long before

the current clans rose to power.”

I shook my head slowly. “I don't understand.”

“You will.” He reached toward my forehead.

Instinctively, I pulled away. “Don't touch me.”

His hand stopped in midair.

For a moment, his crimson eyes narrowed, but he lowered his hand without arguing.

“You are confused because your memories were damaged after what happened to you.”

My pulse quickened. What did he mean? I stared at him, trying to find even a hint of truth in

his expression.

“What happened to me?”

The Elder's expression darkened. “You truly remember nothing.”

“I told you. I don’t remember anything.” I pressed a hand to my temple, as though I could force something loose. There was nothing to force. Just silence where a past should have lived. “Tell me. Please.”

He studied me for a long moment before he spoke. “You once had someone you loved more than anything.”

A strange ache spread through my chest, though I couldn’t have said what caused it. “Who?”

“Your mate.”

“I had a mate?”

“Yes.” His voice softened. “You shared a bond with him, one older and deeper than most vampires ever know.”

“What happened to him?”

The Elder’s eyes flashed red. “The wolves happened to him.”

I frowned. “Wolves?”

“Creatures who have oppressed our kind for generations,” he said. “Beasts who believe their

blood makes them superior. Beasts who took everything from you.”

My heart began pounding, though I couldn’t have explained why. “What did they do?”

“They tore him apart in front of you.”

I covered my mouth. “No...”

“You begged them to spare him, but they didn’t. They killed him. They destroyed the only person who mattered to you,” the Elder continued. “You swore revenge.”

I squeezed my eyes shut. Why didn’t I have any memories of what the Elder was saying? I tried to imagine it all happening. My mate being killed by wolves.

When I opened my eyes, the Elder was watching me closely.

“You have spent years mourning him,” he said.

Years. How long had I existed like this? How long had I carried a grief I couldn’t even

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remember earning?

“You have only one purpose now.”

I looked at him. “What?”

“Revenge.”

The word echoed through me, and something dark stirred beneath my skin in answer. My fingers curled into fists.

The Elder rose to his full height. “The wolves have oppressed our kind for generations. They

believe they are superior to us, and we must remain beneath them.” His eyes burned red. “But

you can change that.”

I rose unsteadily to my feet. “How?”

“You possess power no vampire has carried for centuries.” He looked at me with something

close to reverence. “With your strength, this clan can rise, and we can finally destroy the wolves.”

I stared at the flames dancing around the room, waiting for some part of me to argue, to push back, to tell me any of this was wrong. Nothing came.

There was no name rising up to contradict him, no face pulling at the edges of my mind.

There was only the story he had given me, and the grief that had settled into the shape he’d

carved for it.

“My mate was killed by wolves,” I said quietly, testing the words.

“Yes.” He nodded.

“And I am a vampire countess whose purpose is to destroy them.”

The Elder smiled. “That is who you are.”

I looked toward the dark windows and let the words settle into place as I whispered, “I will

destroy the wolves.”

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 429

Damon’s POV

Noah’s wounds had been treated, but he still looked as though death had nearly claimed him.

His shirt was stained with dried blood, and fresh bandages were wrapped tightly around his

torso. He sat on the edge of a broken stone platform while the healer examined his injuries

one last time.

I stood several feet away, staring into the ruins.

Aria was gone.

The thought had become a constant ache inside my chest, one that refused to fade no matter how hard I tried to push it away.

Rhein paced restlessly beneath my skin.

Find her. Find our mate.

“I know.”

Then stop standing here.

My jaw tightened. "I'm thinking."

You're not thinking. You're hurting.

I closed my eyes briefly. That was an understatement. Every part of me wanted to shift, tear

through the forest, and hunt down every vampire who had taken Aria. I wanted blood. I

wanted answers. Most of all, I wanted my mate back.

But charging blindly after the vampires would accomplish nothing.

I needed a plan.

"Alpha." Justin's voice pulled me from my thoughts.

I turned and found him standing beside Noah, his expression grim.

"Noah wants to speak with you."

My gaze shifted to Noah. He was already watching me. There was something different in his

expression. Something I hadn't seen there before. Guilt.

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I walked toward him. "What is it?"

Noah pushed himself off the stone, but instead of standing, he immediately dropped to his knees.

I stopped in front of him. "What are you doing?"

"I need to tell you the truth."

My eyes narrowed. "What truth?"

He swallowed hard, his fingers tightening against his thighs.

"When I first recommended the witch to Aria, it wasn't only because I believed she could help

Aria become free of the vampire bloodline.”

My hands slowly curled into fists.

Rhein went completely still inside me. What did he do?

I stared at Noah. “What are you saying?”

Noah lifted his eyes to mine. “I had another reason.”

A cold feeling settled in my stomach. “What reason?”

He hesitated for several seconds before finally forcing the words out. “I wanted Aria to become attached to me.”

There was silence. For a moment, I couldn’t process what I’d heard. Then my claws pushed

through my fingertips.

Justin took a cautious step backward.

Rhein snarled violently inside me. What the hell?

I took a step toward Noah. “Explain.”

Noah lowered his gaze. “When Aria was struggling with everything that was happening around her, I thought...”

He paused, shame flickering across his face. “I thought that if the witch could work some kind of love charm during the spell, something that would make Aria depend on me, perhaps

she would eventually grow close to me.”

My breathing grew heavier. “You used Aria.”

www

Noah flinched.

“You manipulated a woman who was already vulnerable and put her life in danger because

you wanted her to love you?”

His eyes filled with regret. "Yes."

The admission only made my anger burn hotter.

"I thought the witch would help Aria with her bloodline and perhaps influence her feelings."

His voice cracked. "I never imagined she was working for the vampires."

I stared at him, barely able to contain the fury surging through me.

"You brought that woman into Aria's life. You convinced Aria to trust her, and now the vampires have her."

Noah flinched again. My words hung heavily between us. I could see the guilt consuming him.

"I was selfish," he said quietly. "I wanted Aria for myself. I wanted her to need me. I wanted

her to look at me the way she looks at you."

His expression tightened as he glanced toward the destroyed clearing. "But I never wanted

this."

He gestured weakly toward the ruins around us.

"I never wanted her taken. I never wanted the vampires involved. I never imagined the working

would become a trap."

He lowered his head. "I did wrong, Damon."

I said nothing.

Noah remained on his knees, his shoulders tense beneath his bloodstained clothes.

"I should have put her safety first," he continued. His voice had grown quieter. "I should have

cared more about protecting her than about getting what I wanted."

My claws slowly withdrew, but the anger remained. I could have killed him. Part of me still

e wanted to.

Rhein growled beneath my skin. He deserves punishment.

I looked at Noah. He was still kneeling, waiting for my judgment. Perhaps he expected me to

strike him. Perhaps he even believed he deserved it.

I stepped closer until I stood directly in front of him. Noah closed his eyes. For one moment,

I considered hitting him. But what would that accomplish?

A broken jaw wouldn't bring Aria back. Blood on my hands wouldn't undo what had happened.

And killing Noah wouldn't erase the mistake that had put my mate into the vampires' hands.

I took a slow breath and stepped past him.

"Damon?"

I stopped. I didn't turn around immediately. After a moment, I looked over my shoulder.

Noah was staring at me, confusion written across his face.

"If you want to atone for what you did," I said, my voice cold, "then come with me."

His brows drew together. "Where?"

I held his gaze. "To bring her back."

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 430

Aria's POV

The following morning, the Elder took me to the heart of the vampire territory. I had expected a few vampires to be waiting for me, perhaps the leaders of the clan or a small gathering to formally acknowledge my new position.

Instead, the entire courtyard was filled.

Hundreds of vampires stood in orderly rows, their crimson eyes fixed on me. Some wore elaborate robes adorned with dark embroidery, while others were dressed like warriors, weapons strapped securely to their bodies.

Their expressions varied from curiosity to suspicion, but every gate remained locked on me.

It felt as though they were waiting to see whether I truly deserved the title the Elder had given me.

The Elder stepped forward, his voice carrying across the courtyard.

“Vampires of the clan, I present to you your Mistress.”

A murmur rippled through the crowd.

I remained beside him, unsure of what I was supposed to do. Mistress. The word still felt strange when it was used to describe me. I had spent most of my life as a werewolf, and now I was standing before an entire vampire clan as their leader.

The Elder turned toward me. “Show them what you can do. Let them see how powerful their Mistress truly

is.”

He gestured toward an enormous boulder positioned at the centre of the courtyard.

I glanced at the stone before looking back at him.

“You want me to destroy that?”

He nodded calmly. “Yes.”

I turned toward the boulder again. It was enormous, easily several times my size. Under normal circumstances, destroying something like that would have required considerable strength, even for a powerful supernatural being.

But something inside me stirred.

Power moved beneath my skin, warm and restless. I could feel it gathering in my veins, responding to my thoughts before I even consciously summoned it.

I walked toward the boulder. The vampires watched in complete silence.

I stopped a few feet away and raised my hand. I didn't know exactly what I was about to do. I simply followed the instinct rising inside me.

I swept my hand through the air. The boulder exploded.

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The thunderous c***k shook the entire courtyard. Chunks of stone flew in every direction, forcing the vampires nearest to it to retreat. A thick cloud of dust erupted into the air, swallowing the courtyard in seconds.

I lowered my hand and stared at it. I hadn't expected that much power, Judging by the stunned silence behind me, neither had they

The dust slowly settled. When it finally cleared, there was nothing left of the enormous boulder except scattered fragments of stone.

Silence descended over the courtyard. Then one vampire dropped to his knees.

"Mistress."

Another followed. Then another. Within seconds, the entire courtyard was kneeling before me, addressing me as "Mistress."

The word echoed around me from hundreds of voices. I stared at them, feeling a strange sensation spread through my chest.

They were afraid of me, and somehow, I liked it. There was something intoxicating about having that much power over an entire clan. No one questioned me. No one challenged me. They simply bowed.

The Elder stood behind me, watching with a satisfied smile.

I slowly lowered my hand. "Stand. Every one of you."

Everyone rose immediately. The obedience was absolute. A faint smile touched my lips.

The Elder stepped beside me. "They will follow your commands from henceforth," he said. He then turned toward the vampires. "Prepare the war chamber."

Without hesitation, the vampires dispersed.

I followed the Elder into the fortress.

The war chamber was buried deep beneath the castle, far from the main halls. The heavy doors opened into a vast room illuminated by dim torches.

A massive table occupied the centre, its surface covered with maps detailing territories, forests, borders. and strongholds belonging to the wolves.

The moment I entered, my attention was drawn to the maps.

The Elder placed several markers across them.

“The wolves have always depended on their strength and numbers,” he said. “But they are not invincible.”

I stood across from him. “What are their weaknesses?”

He pointed toward one of the marked territories.

“Their healing is fast, but certain weapons can interfere with it. Silver remains effective against ordinary wolves, although stronger bloodlines can resist its effects.”

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+listened carefully, committing every word to memory.

“Their pack structure is another weakness,” he continued. “Take away their Alpha, and their coordination suffers. Without their leader, even powerful warriors can become disorganized.”

He moved another marker across the map. “Their communication between territories is also important. If we disrupt it, neighbouring packs will struggle to respond when one of them is attacked.”

I leaned closer to the table.

The Elder continued explaining their patrol routes, defensive points and territories controlled by the wolves. He showed me where their warriors gathered, which routes they used to move between territories and which locations would be easiest to infiltrate.

Then he began explaining how we could exploit those weaknesses.

“We don’t attack every pack at once,” he said.

I looked at him. “That would allow them to unite.”

“Exactly.” He moved another marker across the map. “We strike their communication lines first. Then we isolate their strongest territories, take their leaders and destroy the rest.”

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Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 431

Aria’s POV

I studied the map carefully.

It was a calculated strategy. Instead of giving the wolves a common enemy to rally against, we would keep them divided. We would attack quickly, weaken them from within and prevent them from coming together.

It sounded like a great plan.

The Elder looked at me. “With you leading us, they will not stand a chance.”

Something about those words stirred my pride.

I wanted to believe him.

I wanted to see the wolves kneel before me the way the vampires had.

The Elder returned his attention to the map and moved one final marker. "This pack will be our first point of attack."

I stared at the territory he had marked. "What pack is that?"

The Elder studied me for a moment. "It is the Grayson Pack."

A sharp throb suddenly pulsed behind my eyes.

I sucked in a breath and pressed two fingers against my temple.

For a brief moment, something stirred deep inside me. Something I couldn't quite grasp. Then it disappeared. I frowned.

"Are you all right?" the Elder asked.

"It is just a headache."

The pain faded almost as quickly as it had come, leaving nothing behind. I lowered my hand.

"Grayson," I repeated, testing the unfamiliar word on my tongue.

It meant nothing to me. There was no recognition. No memory. Nothing that told me the name should matter. So I pushed the strange feeling aside.

The Elder pointed toward the territory again. "Our first strike will cripple their defenses."

I stared at the map. The Grayson Pack. For some reason, the name continued to linger at the edge of my thoughts, even though I couldn't understand why. But I refused to dwell on it.

The Elder had already begun laying out the details of our revenge, and this time, I would be at the head of

Damon's POV

Chapter 431e

Nooh and i had spent several hours searching for the witch.

She had fled during the attack, disappearing before we could reach her. But if we were going to find Aria, we had to find the witch first. She was the only person who knew exactly what had happened to my mate and where the vampires had taken her.

We eventually tracked her scent to an abandoned mine hidden deep within the forest.

I moved through the narrow tunnel with Noah several steps behind me. The air was damp and stale, carrying the faint scent of earth and old magic.

Rhein's senses were stretched tight. Every muscle in my body was ready to strike. She's close.

I clenched my jaw. The witch?

Yes. Rhein's growl rumbled through my chest. Find her. She knows where our mate is.

Our mate. Those words sent another wave of fury through me.

Aria was out there somewhere, surrounded by vampires who had taken her. I didn't know what they had done to her, and the uncertainty was driving me to the edge.

Ahead, I heard movement. I stopped abruptly.

Noah nearly walked into my back.

"What is it?" he whispered.

I raised a hand, silencing him. We stood completely still. For several seconds, there was nothing but the distant drip of water.

Then I heard a heartbeat. It was fast and terrified.

My eyes narrowed. I moved before Noah could say another word.

I rounded the corner and found the witch pressed against the far wall, clutching a small bag tightly against her chest. Her hair was dishevelled, and dirt covered the dark robes she had been wearing when she performed the ritual.

The moment she saw us, her eyes widened. "No."

She turned and tried to run. I crossed the distance in seconds.

My hand closed around the back of her collar, and I slammed her against the stone wall.

"Where is Aria?"

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 432

Damon's POV

The witch gasped, her hands flying to my wrist. "Alpha Damon... I don't know."

I tightened my grip, the fabric digging into her throat. "Do not lie to me."

"I'm not lying."

Noah stepped closer, his expression hard. "You know where she is."

The witch's gaze flicked toward him. I saw the fear in her eyes. That was enough. She knew exactly what was at stake.

I leaned closer, my eyes burning. "You turned her into a vampire and helped the vampires take her."

The witch swallowed. "I only did it because they promised me I would see my dead child again."

For a moment, I stared at her. Then my anger returned twice as strong. "I don't care why you did it." My voice dropped into a dangerous growl. "Tell me where they took her."

She shook her head. "I can't."

My temper snapped. I slammed her harder against the wall. Stone cracked behind her.

"You can, and you will tell me now!"

Her eyes widened as fear rippled across her face.

"I have been patient," I growled. "But that patience is running out. Tell me where the vampires took my

mate."

Rhein snarled inside me. Make her talk.

I could barely control the shift threatening to break through my skin. My claws pushed against my fingertips before I forced them back.

The witch trembled. “The vampires are already hunting me. I’m hiding here because they’re trying to kill me even after I helped them. If I take you there, they’ll kill me.”

“I’ll kill you first if you don’t tell me where she is.” My eyes glowed as my Alpha power surged through me. “And it won’t be an easy death, Mara.” I leaned closer. “I will tear you to shreds and leave your flesh for the birds. So choose carefully.”

The colour drained from her face.

Noah folded his arms across his chest. “He’s right about that.”

The witch stared between us. For several seconds, she said nothing. Then her shoulders sagged. “Fine.” She swallowed hard. “I’ll tell you.”

I loosened my grip slightly, but I didn’t release her.

<Chapter 432-

“She was taken to a vampire territory beyond the eastern ridge. There’s an old fortress built into the mountain, past the abandoned forest.”

My pulse jumped. “Blackthorn?”

Her eyes widened. “Yes.”

Noah looked at me. “The old vampire stronghold.”

I nodded. I’d heard stories about Blackthorn. The fortress had supposedly been abandoned for years.

The vampires had gone to great lengths to make everyone believe the place was nothing more than a forgotten ruin. But if the witch was telling the truth, my mate was there:

Hope surged through me.

She is there. Rhein’s voice was filled with certainty. Then we go.

I released the witch. She stumbled forward and caught herself against the wall, rubbing her throat.

“You’re coming with us.”

Her head snapped toward me. “What?”

“You heard me.” I stepped toward her. “You’re going to show us the way.”

Her expression hardened. “You want to walk straight into vampire territory?”

I looked toward the tunnel entrance. “I am willing to do whatever it takes to find my mate.”

Rhein growled inside me. Nothing stands between us and her.

The witch stared at me for several seconds. “You aren’t thinking clearly.”

I turned my gaze back to her. “You’re right.” My voice was cold. “I stopped thinking clearly the moment they took my mate.”

Something in my expression must have convinced her because she finally nodded. “Fine. I’ll take you

there.”

I released the tension in my shoulders. The witch gathered her things and started toward the tunnel entrance. Noah fell into step beside me. We moved quickly through the mine.

The moment we emerged from the tunnel, cold night air struck my face. I inhaled deeply. The scent of the forest rushed into my lungs, carrying the familiar scents of trees, damp earth and distant wolves.

We moved through the forest at a run. The witch struggled to keep up, but I didn’t slow down. Every second mattered. Every breath mattered. Every beat of my heart seemed to carry the same command.

Find Aria. Bring her home. Kill anyone who tries to stop me.

The eastern ridge finally appeared ahead. Beyond it, dark mountains rose against the night s Somewhere on the other side of those mountains was the vampire territory.

Blackthorn.

Chapter 432-

I slowed for only a moment. My fingers curled into fists as I let the Alpha power inside me rise.

Rhein’s claws scraped against my mind. Our mate is in there somewhere.

I stared into the darkness. She is.

My jaw tightened. Let’s go bring her home.

I took the first step toward the vampire territory. I didn't look back.

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Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 433

Damon's POV

We soon slipped into the outskirts of the vampire territory. The moment we crossed into their domain, the stench of vampire blood and dark magic grew stronger.

I slowed my steps and raised a hand, stopping Noah and the witch behind me.

They were close. Very close.

Rhein's senses stretched to their limit as he searched the darkness. They're here.

Noah crouched beside me and peered through the trees. "I can see movement."

I followed his gaze. At first, I saw nothing but shadows shifting between the trees. Then one of those shadows stepped forward.

A vampire. Another appeared behind him. Then another. My jaw tightened. There were dozens of them.

I studied the clearing more carefully. These weren't ordinary patrols. They were assembling. Weapons

were being distributed. Blades were being checked. Armour was being fastened. Vampires moved through the clearing with the cold efficiency of soldiers preparing for war.

Rhein's growl rumbled deep inside my chest. There are too many. They're not just scouting. They're preparing for something big.

My eyes narrowed. "They're preparing to attack."

Noah's expression hardened as he watched the vampires. "The wolves."

I nodded. The sight sent a wave of cold fury through me. They were preparing to invade wolf territory. Our territory. Our people. And somewhere among them was Aria.

Find her. Rhein's voice cut through my thoughts. Find our mate.

“I know.”

I moved deeper into the trees, keeping low. We needed to know where Aria was before making a move. Charging into an army of vampires without knowing their numbers or understanding their defenses would

be suicide.

I hated every second of waiting. Every instinct inside me screamed to attack. My wolf wanted blood. My Alpha wanted to tear through every vampire standing between us and Aria. But I forced myself to remain

still.

Then I saw her.

My entire body froze. She stood on a raised stone platform overlooking the clearing.

Aria... My Aria.

For a moment, I forgot how to breathe.

<Chapter 433-

determination. Or we die trying.

I cast one final look at the woman standing on the ridge. My fated mate. The woman I loved was staring out over an army that was preparing to tear through her own territory under the cover of darkness.

She didn't know me. She didn't remember herself. And yet, I refused to believe she was truly gone. I held onto that belief with everything I had.

Then I turned away. “We're going.”

I broke into a run. Noah followed immediately, with the witch close behind. I didn't look back. If I did, I knew I might lose the strength to leave.

So I ran toward the people I needed to save, carrying only one certainty with me. I would bring Aria home. Even if I had to fight an entire vampire army to do it.

You're all caught up with Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha.