

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 41

Aria's POV

Beep-Beep-

A honk sounded from behind-someone waiting to pass. I let out a sigh, breaking the stalemate

et's go. I don't want to keep my brother waiting."

Without waiting for Damon to respond, I stepped out of his arms and walked toward the Mayba

I didn't look back.

The car door opened for me. I slid into the back seat, the leather cold against my skin, and stare straight ahead.

A moment later, Damo

Neither of us spok

le me. The door closed. The engine hummed to life.

No one re

Jos

t

d at lunch.

the good china, fresh flowers at the center of the table, a spread that wa

ah and he were talking shop about the new hospital wing, swapping old

..It should've felt warm.

n was there.

my knife and fork, trying to eat.

was good. Perfect, really. But it sat heavy in my stomach. Every time I looked up,

Y's eyes were on me. Not staring, exactly. Just... there. Watching. Like a hunter tracking prey.

e torture. Honestly.

contributed when I co

But inside, somethi

right moments, smiled when Joshua glanced my way.

alf an hour

urse. He glanced at the screen and sighed.

s took a bad turn. I need to get back.”

said quietly. “Come by in a few days. We’ll catch up then.”

i

Noah shrugged on his jacket and stepped toward me. “Aria... walk me out?” His voice was gente.

Careful.

“Sure.” I stood without hesitation.

I needed air. Needed out.

A cold, piercing gaze landed on me from across the table. I didn’t need to look to know/whose.

I moved to Noah’s side and gave him a small smile. “Come on.”

He nodded, shot one quick look at Damon, and we walked out together.

The moment we stepper

shattering on the floo

I didn’t look back

The garden w

“Ah-choo!”

Noah in

care

the doors, I heard it-the sharp clink-crash of a wine glass

arp breeze cut through my thin sweater.

his jacket over my shoulders. “Aria, you’re not dressed warm enough. Take

“Thanks.”

is throat working like he wanted to say more. His mouth opened... then closed. “I

I’ll text you soon.”

lingered at the gate until his Bentley pulled out of the Grayson drive and vanished

corner.

ned back toward the house.

ng room was empty. Joshua and Damon weren’t there.

a Joshua and Alpha Damon are in the study upstairs.” Lawrence was polishing a picture

ne as he spoke to me.

oked at the frame in his hands. A family photo-the three of us.

y father’s smiling face stared back at me, and suddenly Claudia’s words from the café slammed ack into my head: The second you

pulse kicked up hard.

ded to ask Jos

in that prison, you and your brother are finished!

+2x Point

I made my way up to the study on the second floor. Just as I was about to knock, Damon's volup

came from inside-cold as steel.

"What makes you think you can ask me for a damn thing?"

Then Joshua answered, "I know you despise the Grayson name. I get it. But if you're willing to help

I'm offering ten percent of Grayson Group shares. Straight to you. Full control."

art sank.

on Group... had it really come to this?

on let out a short, mocking laugh.

Big gesture, Mr. Grayson. Sham family choke on the consequent percent. If anything, I'd lov

"What did you just say

But I wasn't surprised

This was just Da

And me.

Forever

"QU

es nothing for me." His voice turned brutal. "Watching your

air greed? That's worth a hell of a lot more than ten

work harder."

ded like he couldn't believe what he'd heard.

Damon said flatly. "What you should be doing is praying your old man

e from inside.

zen in place.

e mean by that?

he mean by... pray your old man holds out a little longer?

ppened to Dad?

lashed out, finc

. He leaned in close, his eyes

“We’re not divorced yet. Don’t let me hear about you getting too close to other men. Beca
His hold tightened until pain sparked along my jaw. “I swear I’ll make you regret every s

He shoved me back and stalked away.

My heart slammed against my ribs. My chin throbbed. I stood there for a long moment, for
into my lungs.

Then I smoothed my shirt and stepped into the study.

“Joshua?”

He blinked, forced a we

“Joshua...” I searche

“No. Everything’

“Then what’s

A sheet s

Josh

Did Noah leave?”

the company in trouble again?”

for the equity transfer papers on the desk.

older and drifted to the floor.

ot there first.

emoptysis and syncope, dyspnea, and chest pain. Suspected CHF. MI not

Grayson.

bed.

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 42

Aria's POV

+25 P

I stared at the page. The words blurred together. I blinked hard, trying to make them rearrange themselves into something else. Something that wasn't this.

No.

My fingers tightened on the paper, crumpling the edge.

This isn't real.

"Aria," Joshua started.

"It's fake, isn't it?" My voice came out thin. Foreign. "You're faking a diagnosis. For early release paperwork. Right?"

Joshua stared at the floor for a long, terrible moment. When he finally looked up, his eyes were

shattered.

"It's real."

The word hit me like a physical blow.

"No." My voice cracked. "No. Last visit, he was fine. He told us it was just a cold!"

"The prison called a while back." Joshua's voice stayed even, but I could hear the strain holding it together. "He'd been sick for months. Never complained. Five days ago, he coughed up blood and collapsed." He paused. "The doctors confirmed advanced heart disease. He needs compassionate release for treatment immediately... or it won't end well."

I wanted to scream. I wanted to throw th

paper across the room and pretend I'd never seen it. But the words on the page were real. The pain on Joshua's face was real.

And somewhere in a prison cell, our dad was dying alone,

"Then why don't we just apply for medical parole right now?"

Joshua pressed his lips together. Didn't say anything.

"Joshua, just tell me. Did something go wrong with Dad's application?"

He sighed.

"I had the lawyer apply after I got the call from the prison. But after several attempts..."

"All rejected."

I paused, then pressed on. "What was the reason?"

Joshua just shook his head.

And I understood.

No reason. Or the reasons they gave didn't matter. Someone just didn't want Dad getting out fo treatment. They wanted him to die in there.

Who?

Who

ed our dad dead?

ot through my head before I could stop it. My blood froze. I forced the words out. "It's

ehind this, isn't it-"

rison Cole."

son Cole?

e name sounded familiar. Then it came back to me.

He was one of the victims from that Grayson Group construction collapse two years ago.

He barely got a scratch, yet he tried to squeeze us for two million in compensation, only to show up at the company with his family and make a whole scene when we refused.

And I ended up in the hospital because he threw a rock at my head. Joshua got furious and called the police. Harrison got six months for assault.

“His wife has a relative who’s the warden at Dad’s facility,” Joshua said.

And just like that, everything clicked.

“So you asked Damon for help?” I paused. “He said no, didn’t he?”

I already knew the answer before I even asked.

Damon had no reason to help. He’d be happier if Dad died sooner.

Joshua didn’t say yes or no. He iust said, “Aria, don’t overthink this. Just trust me. I’ll figure it out. I’ll make sure Dad get

I didn’t say an

But ther

My

h this alone.

WH

Right. Walter!

He was such a kind person, and he’d always been so good to Dad!

I grabbed my phone and called Hawthorne Residence.

+25 PS

After three rings, a polite voice answered: “Hello, this is Hawthorne Residence. May I help you?”

“Hi Charles, is Walter home? It’s Aria.” My hands were shaking as I spoke.

“Oh! Luna.” Charles sounded genuinely surprised. “Alpha Walter left for Switzerland yesterday-h annual wellness retreat. He’ll be there for several weeks, completely off the grid. Is there

something I can help with?”

“So he’s completely u

nable?” I asked.

“I’m afraid so,” C

I ended the c

I sat there

Dad’s

ent deathly quiet.

darkness, letting the silence settle around me.

And I can’t reach him. I can’t reach anyone who can help. I can’t do anything

answer.

more than anything. Lydia always had a direction, a pull, even if it was reckless. was just... still.

y father’s name on the crumpled report, at the cold, clinical words that spelled out his
ence.

re’s still another way.

amon’s POV

My phone rang as I pulled away fr

Crayson house.

Tim. I let it ring twice, th

‘ou better have

e was alw

‘y irritation. It was all because of Aria.

head.

e are you?"

"On the road. Why?"

"need to show you something. Tonight. Office?"

"What is it?"

"Not over the phone." A pause. "Damon. I found them."

My blood froze.

"Twenty minutes." I pressed my foot on the accelerator. "I'm coming now."

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Chapter 43

Chapter 42-1

Chapter 42-1

Damon's POV

425 Paint

"Here you go. The thing you asked me to look into-Ronan Grayson's medical parole case. Got the results." Tim handed me a stack of printed documents, sat down, and crossed his legs.

I picked up the thick file and opened it. My eyes landed on the name on the first page: Harrison

Cole.

I closed the folder, set it back on the table, and looked at Tim. "Don't tell me this is what you meant

by 'them.'

I thought what Tim was handing me was the whereabouts of the family of that wolf from five years

ago.

The one who betrayed the pack. The wolf who'd led the ice-wolf pack straight to our camp. one who vanished overnight-taking his mate, his children, every trace of his existence.

The

"But this guy is connected to 'them.'" He tapped the file on the table. "I only tracked them down because I was looking into the medical parole case."

"Go on."

"These past five years, they've moved around a lot. Always staying in crowded places, using fake identities," Tim said.

"Fake identities?" Justin frowned. "No wonder we sent so many people, burned so many resources -still couldn't find them."

"Someone helped them disappear. I've been sitting on this for two days. Pulled the financials, the fake IDs, the whole five-year trail." A beat of silence. "Damon, Harrison Cole is the guy."

Tim slid a photo across the table.

This was the man who'd helped my enemies evade my wolves all this time. Who'd kept them hidden right under my nose.

"I need everything on Harrison Cole. His address. His security. Everyone who works for him. And..."

My voice went cold. "Send some guards. Bring the man to the dungeon. I'll-"

The words stopped in my throat.

The pain came out of nowhere.

It wasn't physical. It was deeper. Darker. Like something was reaching into my very soul and

< Chapter 42-1

ripping it apart, piece by piece.

One moment I was sitting. The next, I was on my knees, a raw, guttural sound tearing itself from my chest. I pressed my hand against my ribs, but it wasn't there-it was deeper. Burrowed into my

bones, my blood, my soul.

Sharp. Unrelenting.

Rhein was going wild inside me-snarling, thrashing, desperate.

Aria.

The name slammed into my skull. She's hurt. She's dying. Our mate is dying!

I gasped for

sounded li

Then th

She

It like drowning. The room blurred. I heard voices-Tim/Justin-but they

underwater.

ned. I choked on a breath.

h darkness, my legs burning, my lungs screaming. Behind me, voices, countless voices, chasing, closing in.

our father destroyed my family! You all deserve to die! You deserve to die!"

wasn't it you?! Why?!"

urderers! Every last Grayson is a murderer! Rot in hell!"

ran until I couldn't run anymore. When I finally stopped and turned, there was no one there. Just darkness. But I could still hear them, the hatred, the fury, closing in from every direction.

The words kept coming, wrapping around me, dragging me under.

"Aria."

A hand appeared in f

I looked up. De

"Aria, goc

changed-it was someone else, eyes like frozen caves, dark and

IN

Chapter 42-1

hollow. His hand closed around my throat, cold and merciless.

“Aria Grayson,” he snarled. “You’re begging to die.”

His grip tightened. I clawed at his fingers, but he didn’t budge. The pressure built, crushing,

suffocating.

“No!” I tried

I woke up

My he

my

n, but barely a whisper came out. “No! No!” –

against my ribs. The room was white and bright. I lay there, chest heaving, u The walls came into focus. The machines beside the bed.

Th

al?

through my body-every bone, every muscle screaming.

breath, my hands gripping the sheets until the wave passed.

to prop myself against the pillows, my body trembling. My eyes landed on the IV taper d. The needle was small, but it pulled me back.

Chapter 42-2

Chapter 42-2

Remembered what happened.

I went to negotiate with Harrison Cole. He agreed-he'd approve my father's medical parole application, on one condition: I kneel on silver spikes for three hours and repent.

I did it.

But he went back on his word. Instead, three hours later, he walked toward me, the silver cones digging deeper into my knees. He lowered his face, one hand gripping my jaw, the other tearing my

shirt open.

I shoved him back, stood up, and drove the silver spike into his shoulder. He stumbled back, and ran. I collided with someone in the hallway.

And then...

A creak.

The door opened. I snapped my head toward it.

"Aria. You're awake."

Noah crossed the room in three strides, his hand already reaching for my forehead. His palm was warm and steady. He pressed it there for a moment, then pulled back, something in his face

easing.

"How do you feel? Dizzy? Nauseous?"

I shook my head. "How long was I out?"

He poured a glass of water and handed it to me.

"You passed out yesterday," he said.

Yesterday. One day lost. It could have been worse.

I lowered the glass. "Harrison Cole... and my father..."

"Harrison Cole's fine," Noah said. "He woke up before you. Thirty stitches. He'll heal."

I let out a breath. But his face was still tight.

"But your father..." He stopped.

My chest clenched. “What about him?”

He looked away, then back at me. Something in his expression made me even more nervous.

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Chapter 44

Chapter 42-2

“He wasn’t allowed to receive treatment. The doctors say that if this keeps up...” He paused. “H

might not make it past six months.”

Six months?” My vision blurred. I let myself fall back against the pillows, breathing uneven

“Aria.” Noah was beside me, his hand on my shoulder. “Easy. Take a breath.”

“He can’t,” I couldn’t finish. My vision blurred. “He can’t just be given up on like this. He can’t.”

“I know. But you need to rest first. You can’t help him if you collapse again.”

Noah’s voice was lower. “You went alone to Harrison Cole’s place. Do you have any idea what

could have happened? If Astrid hadn’t called me, if I hadn’t found you-”

“I’m sorry.” The tears came before I could stop them.

“I’m sorry. I wasn’t thinking. I just...” I looked at him, my voice breaking. “I just needed to do

something. I couldn’t sit there and let my dad-”

Noah’s face softened. He pulled me into a hug and just let me cry.

After a moment, I wiped my eyes. “Please don’t tell my brother.”

He looked into my eyes. “Fine. I’ll keep it from Joshua. For now.”

I let out a breath.

“But

you

need to rest. No more running off alone. No more knives. You stay here, you heal, and then we figure out the rest together.”

He smoothed my hair away from my face gently and helped me lie back against the pillows.

“Sleep,” he said. “I’ll stay until you’re out.”

I nodded. I was too tired to hold onto everything.

I let myself drift.

Damon’s POV

The dri

clay

fur, my heart slamming against my ribs, Rhein pacing in my chest, urt.

it wait for the elevator.

I

Chapter 42-2

The pain in my chest had faded somewhere along the way.

didn’t know if that was worse.

I pushed open the door to the eighth floor.

Room 802. I walked toward it. I was five feet away when I pushed the door open.

She was in the bed, face pale, eyes closed-but she was alive.

And Noah...

He was bent over her, his lips pressed to her forehead.

Kissing her.

T

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

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Damon's POV

Too intimate.

My hands curled into fists at my sides. My vision tunneled. Red. Hot.

Rhein was snarling. Mine. Ours. Take her-take her back!

I didn't move. Couldn't. If I did, I wouldn't stop. My hands would wrap around his throat. My claws

would tear. Rhein would have his blood.

I couldn't.

Tear Noah apart just to prove I cared about her? That was insane.

Kill him!

Tear him!

Mine, Rhein kept saying. She's mine. She's ours. Not his. Never his.

He was pacing in my chest, snarling, clawing, a low, possessive growl building in my throat.

The words burned in my chest. Every second he stayed there, every second his skin touched hers-

I was losing control.

Inch by inch...

Until his fingers finally grazed her lips.

The thread I'd been holding onto-the one keeping me grounded-snapped clean in two.

Yes. She's ours.

A bloodthirsty urge surged through me.

I took a few steps forward.

Ding-

My phone suddenly rang. Justin.

"Alpha. We brought Harrison Cole to the pack dungeons. Already got some information out of him.

You want to come over?"

I glanced back at the scene in the hospital room.

"Give me an hour."

Justin hesitated for a beat. "He's not doing great. Might not make it."

Ngripped the phone tighter, a flicker of something crossing my mind.

"On my way."

+25 Poet

The basement was cold and dark. Harrison was hanging from the ceiling, his arms twisted above his head, his hospital gown already soaked through with blood and sweat.

He'd passed out five minutes ago. Justin had only given him one hit, and the man crumpled like

paper.

I stood in front of him, studying his face.

"Wake him up."

Justin stepped forward with a bucket.

The water hit Cole's face, and he came to with a strangled sound, his eyes wild, his mouth gaping.

"Alpha, please."

I turned away.

Tim was standing by the table against the wall, a thick file in his hands.

He held it out to me.

"Harrison Cole's history." He sat down on the bench, crossing his legs. "Turns out he's been busy."

I took the file. Opened it. I flipped past the first few pages, my eyes scanning, looking for something I didn't know I was searching for.

And then I found it.

A section marked with a paperclip. Photos. Documents. Identity papers. And at the bottom, a

name I recognized.

Five

years ago. The ice-wolf attack, the storm.

Cole had provided false identities. For the families of the wolves who'd betrayed us.

I closed the file.

"Cole," I said, turning back to him.

He was looking at me. "Please, I didn't know who they were. He just sent the file. He paid me. I

didn't ask questions."

T

"The families of traitors," I said. "You gave them new names. New lives. You helped them disappear."

I could see him trying to find the words, the lie that would make this go away.

But som

“What

Col

Ise had my attention.

to Aria?” I wrapped my fingers around his throat.

+25 P

ed between mine, barely breathing. “I-I made her wait. In the yard. That’s it.” He

dn’t even touch her.”

touch her?” I tightened my grip.

eillance footage flashed through my mind. This piece of filth had put his hands on what

n her knees in his courtyard under that scorching sun. The way he’d looked at her-hungry, dy, disgusting. Like he wanted to tear her apart. It drove me insane.

in surged forward in my head, claws out, teeth bared. Tear him apart. Right now. For her-our

ate.

gave him exactly what he wanted. I tightened my fingers around Cole’s throat.

He started coughing violently, the sound grating against my ears. “I didn’t... fine. Fine. I admit it. I

did.”

“But I didn’t mean it. Someone set me up. Someone wanted me to go after her-after her father.”

“Who?”

O

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Chapter 46

Damon's POV

"I don't know. Please, please let go." He was still coughing.

"Alright."

+25 Port

I released his neck and grabbed his shoulder instead. Then I took a thick silver spike and drove t

deep into his wound.

"Ahh-!" His scream echoed through the dungeon.

Blood sprayed from his artery. The metallic stench of iron filled the air.

It should have been enough. Should have calmed me.

It wasn't.

The fury was still there, still clawing to tear its way out of my veins.

I shoved the spike deeper, twisting, grinding it into raw flesh. Bone scraped against metal. Blood poured over my fingers-warm, thick. Not enough. Never enough.

The scent of his fear, his pain, his dying-it filled my lungs. But the rage was still there. Still hungry.

I pulled the spike out. Drove it in again.

"I asked-who?!"

"I-I don't know his name. I swear to the Moon Goddess, I don't know. Really."

"Then you have no reason to exist." My hand closed around his throat again.

I tightened my grip until his face turned purple. His hands clawed at my wrist, useless.

"Damon."

Tim's voice.

I didn't let go.

“Damon. He’s not going to be able to tell you anything if you kill him.”

I didn’t react.

‘Control yourself. There’s still so much we don’t know about what happened five years ago. This

concerns the Silvermoon Pack.”

The Silvermoon Pack

P

Rhein’s snarl died in my chest.

My grip loosened. The claws receded.

And I let go.

Cole collapsed, coughing, gagging. I stood over him, hands still shaking, blood still burning.

n here until he tells us everything.” I walked toward the door.

+25 Po

the hell was that? You were about to kill him.” Tim’s voice came from behind me. “I’ve known

teen years. I’ve seen you angry. I’ve seen you cold. But this...” He paused. “This isn’t about the ayal. This isn’t about the snowstorm.”

turned to face him.

“What do you think it’s about?”

He studied me for a long moment.

“You haven’t asked about the traitors once,” Tim said quietly. “All you’ve asked about was her.”

The words slipped out before I could stop them. “She was mine.”

Tim was quiet for a moment. Then he nodded slowly.

“You’re right,” he said.

Aria's POV

I woke to the sound of voices.

"Stable, but she needs rest. The stitches will come out in a week. The dehydration was severe, but there's no permanent damage."

"Thank you, Doctor."

The door opened

He was tall

couldn't

He

sharp features that reminded me of someone I

"Aria. You're awake."

blinked. "Who are you?"

"I'm Marcus-Astrid's brother. Nice to meet you."

Astrid's brother? I'd heard about him-the older brother who'd gone into military service, the one Astrid always talked about with a mix of pride and exasperation. I wasn't that close with Marcus

ly knew he was also Damon's friend.

Astrid was going to take you to Damon's company herself, but she's sick, so she asked me to

come instead."

"Sick? She was fine thi

"She's fine. Just ha

the bag with all m

"I actually have

I hesitated

The c

hat happened? Is she okay?" I got worried.

am at lunch-her stomach's been acting up Marcus picked up

e on, let me take you."

ork to deliver to Damon's company anyway."

en followed Marcus out of the room.

cus got in on the other side.

ndow, staring outside.

Hawthorne Building.

whimper inside me.

bered the last time we were here. In the underground parking garage. Damon had some kind of party favor-handed me off to someone else like I was nothing.

of that day still clung to my skin like something I couldn't wash off. Disgusting. Torture.

deliver these documents to the twelfth floor."

s voice pulled me back to reality.

t." I unbuckled my seatbelt. "Thanks for bringing me, Marcus."

othing. Here." Marcus look

in his office now."

ed at him, confi

his. It let

Vover a card. "Before I came, I asked Damon-

Keep it, just in case. You can give

< Chapter 44

“Something this important... you’re giving it to me?” I tried to keep my voice steady, but the

still slipped through.

Astrid told me about yo

“Okay... Thank you.

this building again

The elevator re

Then it wen

Ding.

er.” He asked with concern. “I’m not helping you. I’m helping A

strid knew Damon had strictly forbidden me from setting/foo

fth floor smoothly.

he seventy-seventh floor-the president’s office.

The el

and the doors slid open.

ard the president’s office and knocked.

ep voice came through the heavy door.

eath and pushed the door open.

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Chapter 47

Aria’s POV

+25 Pont

I noticed it the moment I walked in-the pause in his pen. His hand just froze. Barely a second.

“Aria.”

He knew. Before he even looked up.

Then he lifted his gaze. Those wolf eyes locked onto mine.

Cold. Sharp. Like I was prey already marked for death.

Run.

The word shot through my head before I could stop it. Every instinct screamed at me to turn, to flee, to get out while I still could. But my legs wouldn't move. My lungs wouldn't draw air.

“K-”

His Alpha presence slammed into me, pinning me where I stood. I opened my mouth, tried to form words, but nothing came out.

It hurt. Like being trapped in fire, burning alive-then dropped into ice, freezing from the inside out.

“This is what you get for walking in uninvited. Now get out.” He looked away, went back to flipping

through his papers.

Air rushed back into my lungs.

But I didn't move.

I still had something to say.

“Damon-”

“Three seconds. Get out of my sight. Otherwise, I'll throw you out myself.”

With that, he hit a button on his desk.

Click.

The massive window behind him began to split down the middle.

Wind rushed in-sharp, freezing, slicing through me like blades. My heart stuttered in my chest.

His warning echoed in my ears. If I didn't leave, he would push me out. From the seventy-seventh floor.

”

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But I still had a reason to stay.

“Three.”

I forced myself to stand still.

“Two.”

My fingers curled into fists.

“One!”

“I came to talk about a deal!”

A blur of motion. Before I could react, Damon was in front of me, his claws pressing into my jaw.

“Aria, I gave you a chance!”

Damon's POV

Her presence was like a bomb going off inside my chest.

Rhein paced restlessly beneath my skin-frantic, hungry, furious. I couldn't tell if he wanted to close the distance or tear her apart. Maybe both.

Then the images hit me. Noah leaning over her hospital bed. His lips pressed to her forehead. The surveillance footage of her on her knees in Cole's courtyard. The way he'd touched her. The way he'd looked at her like she was something to devour.

The rage came crashing back. I nearly crossed the room. Nearly wrapped my hands around her throat just to make it stop.

And she had the nerve to come here. To find me.

Who let her in? The Hawthorne Building had top-tier security. There was no way she got up here alone. Someone helped her. Someone would pay for it.

I should have demanded answers. Made her tell me who it was. Made her watch while I showed them exactly what happened to people who helped her behind my back.

But then I looked at her. Pale. Bruised. Barely holding herself together.

And I couldn't.

I let it go. Gave her one chance. A way out. If she left before my patience ran out, I'd let her walk.

She didn't move.

That was it. The last thread snapped.

Aria's POV

+25 P

I was seized. By Damon. Dragged toward the open window. And I couldn't stop it.

He leaned close to my ear, his tone mocking and cruel. "A deal? What makes you think I'd make a

deal with a liar, Aria?"

With that, I was shoved again. Closer. The edge of the window-right there. Nothing but air beneath me.

The wind howled behind me, like a beast ready to devour me. I instinctively reached out to grab

him. "Damon..."

He didn't seem to be listening at all.

Just pulled a safety rope from beside the window and wound it around my waist twice. Grabbing my face with one hand, he looked even more cold and dangerous.

"Good luck, Aria." He gave me a cruel smile.

"What are you doing? Ahh-"

A strong force shoved me out. My body suddenly dropped.

The wind roared in my ears, forcing its way into my lungs.

I couldn't breathe. My mind went blank.

All I could see was Damon's face-looming above me, cold and unfeeling, full of disgust.

Then it hit me-a memory. One I'd buried.

"Aria, you disgust me."

"Aria, you deserve to die."

"Aria, I won't believe a single word you say."

The things Damon had said swirled with the wind, surfacing in my mind. I looked up and saw Damon's figure by the window growing more and more blurry.

My heart felt like it had been shattered. The pain was overwhelming-like something inside me was being ripped apart, piece by piece.

My mate wanted me dead.

hg, I suddenly laughed. A heartbreaking, soul-crushing laugh. I closed my eyes.

How pathetic.

ent, I thought, maybe I should just die like this.

Would I get a chance to start over?

I start over...

I never love Damon Hawthorne again.

nised.

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 48

Aria's POV

The violent cold air slammed into my lungs over and over.

I gasped, but the wind tore the breath from my mouth, shoving it back down my throat until I

choked on it.

“Breathe,” I told myself.

The rope snapped tight around my waist. Pain exploded.

It was crushing-a deep, sickening pressure as the rope dug into my abdomen, forcing the air out of me in a broken cough.

I didn’t dare look down. The moment my eyes dropped, the vast emptiness below seemed to pull at me, tugging at my chest, urging me forward.

Pins and needles spread through my feet. And something hit me.

Dad...

I came here to save Dad.

I couldn’t die.

“Damon!” My voice broke, ripped apart by the wind. “Please...”

But he just stood there. Didn’t even move.

“Lydia...” My thoughts trembled, scattered. Are we... are we going to die? Damon’s going to kill us.

This is it.

Lydia surged forward immediately, frantic. No-no, he wouldn’t. He’s our fated mate. If we die, he feels it. The bond, when it breaks-it rips both ways.

Her words came fast, like she was trying to build something solid out of air. He wouldn’t do that to himself. He wouldn’t... Aria, maybe he’s just trying to scare us. Make a point. Show us how angry he

Look at him, I whispered.

Lydia hesitated.

Look at him. He’s not moving.

Not a step. Not a flinch.

Just... watching.

heart gave a slow, painful thud, like it was finally understanding something my mind had been

refusing to accept.

Lydia... He's not stopping this.

No... she breathed, but it sounded weaker. Unsure.

He's standing there... and he's watching us die.

Lydia didn't try to argue this time. Didn't try to comfort me.

There was nothing left to hold on to.

I'm done hoping, I whispered.

Suddenly, the rope around my waist went taut.

Arms caught me-arms that wrapped around me and pulled me against a strong chest.

"Aria." The voice was rough, urgent. "Aria, can you hear me?"

Damon's POV

Marcus pulled her back inside.

She looked like a ghost-pale. When he first got her over the ledge, she couldn't stop coughing. Her face was streaked with tears, her hair a complete mess from the wind, her dress bunched up

around her thighs.

Marcus helped her over to the couch and eased her down. She just sat there, staring blankly, like she was still stuck out there.

"Aria... you okay?" Marcus asked.

She blinked, coming back to herself a little, then just shook her head. No words.

I let out a quiet scoff. "Since when did you learn how to treat a woman right, Marcus?"

He frowned, shooting me a look. "Damon, you crossed the line this time."

Then he turned back to her, voice softer. "Can you stand? I'll take you out. Astrid's still downstairs waiting for you."

He reached out to help her up.

She pulled back.

“Thank you for saving me, Marcus,” she said, her voice shaky but steady enough. “But Mr. Hawthorne and I... still have something to talk about.”

She called me Mr. Hawthorne.

The word grated.

“You sure you don’t wanna go?” Marcus asked, studying her.

She didn’t answer.

Marcus stood, walked over to me, and stopped right in front of me. He looked me dead in the eye,

then clapped a heavy hand on my shoulder-twice.

“Damon... don’t do something you’re gonna regret.”

Then he walked out and shut the door behind him.

I let out a cold laugh. “Aria... I really underestimated you. You’ve got some nerve, messing with the

people around me.”

“I didn’t.”

Her hands curled into fists in her lap, trembling slightly. “Yeah, I lied to you when I first came in. I’ll admit that. But Damon-believe me or don’t-other than that, I’ve never lied to you. Not once.”

“Not once?”

I looked straight into her eyes, and for a split second, something flickered in my mind. What if... she was telling the truth back then?

Yeah, right.

She’s a liar. Always has been.

Says she loves me to my face, and who knows what she's doing behind my back. Tim was right- everything about her, getting close to me, marrying me... it was all planned.

"You don't need to look at me like that." I let go of her and walked past, dropping into the seat across from her, legs stretched out and crossed. "You came here to ask me to help Ronan, didn't

you?"

*...Yes." She bit her lip. "If you're willing to help my dad get medical parole... I'll do whatever you want. Any condition."

"Whatever I want?" I let out a short laugh. "Aria, you're a little too confident. What exactly do you think you have that's worth making a deal with me?"

She lifted her head and looked straight at me, dead serious.

"What if I agree to divorce you? Right now."

Aria's POV

A flicker of disbelief flashed through Damon's eyes.

"Yes. Claudia might be able to wait a year, but her baby can't. I know you-you'll make sure her child

has a place in the Pack. But as long as I'm still your wife, I have the right to refuse. And she won't approve either." I looked straight at him.

has a place in the

if I refuse, your

"Mr. Hawtho

out that th

"Heh."

Do you want Claudia's child labeled as illegitimate, do you? And once word gets out that Alpha has a bastard child, how do you think the other packs will see you?"

Dan

old laugh.

then threaten. Same trick. You Graysons never change.”

read through my chest. I opened my mouth to argue, to say something-but

d never believe me.

no longer needed him to.

n’t just stand by and watch my father die in prison. What happened two years ago—the forced arriage-was my fault. If you hate me, however you want to take it out on me, I’ll accept it.”

Is that so?”

He raised a brow, taunting. “What if I tell you to jump? Right now. One life for another. Would you do

that?”

My eyes followed his

of that terrifying

My head ran

+howled in. The memory of being pushed out,

felt lik

abeen shoved into saltwater-a sharp, spreading pain

it difficult to breathe.

came out. Dry. Barely there. “So... as long as I jump, you’ll save my

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 49

< Chapter 47

Axia’s POV

“Aria Grayson, you’re not in a position to bargain with me,” he said coldly.

Which meant even if he went back on his word, I still had to believe him.

Otherwise, my father would die.

A faint, helpless smile touched my lips. I forced myself to stand and, without hesitation, walked toward the floor-to-ceiling window.

The wind lifted my hair and pressed my dress tight against my body. One glance down—nothing but endless darkness. My heart started pounding again.

Of course I was afraid.

But I had no other choice.

The memory of my body dropping outside surged back.

Are we really going to jump? Lydia asked, her voice small, shrinking into the corner of my

Yes... I’m sure. If it saves Dad.

I fought down the dizziness and turned back to Damon.

“I hope... Alpha Damon... you keep your word.”

He must have thought I wouldn’t dare. That this was just a show.

Are we really doing this? Maybe we should think again... Lydia scratched anxiously.

No. I’m not joking. This is real.

I closed my eyes and let my body lean backward.

Perhaps falling like this would shatter everything—me and this broken dream—completely.

And... nothing.

mind.

Damon’s POV

My whole world fell away the moment she did.

Time stopped. My heart didn’t just skip—it vanished, leaving nothing but hollow dread.

I had never been afraid of death. Not once.

But the thought of a future-years, decades-stretching out before me without her in it?

That terrified me in a way I didn't know I could be terrified.

In that moment, my body moved before my mind could catch up, arm shooting out, fingers straining-

And I caught her.

Thank the Moon.

I pulled her close, pressing her against the floor-to-ceiling window, steadying her
steadying

myself.

The breath I hadn't realized I'd been holding tore out of me as relief slammed into my chest.

My heart, suddenly back, pounded so hard it hurt. My hands wouldn't stop shaking.

She was right there. In my arms. Alive.

"You're fucking insane! You crazy woman!"

The roar tore out of me-I barely recognized my own voice. A beast that had just watched its

world slip away.

And her?

She just looked at me.

Calm.

Dead calm.

My heart stuttered.

+25 Fung

I felt like falling into the void. Something slipped through my fingers-something vital, something I hadn't even known I was holding until it was gone. I tried to catch it, to hold on, but my hands

closed on empty air.

The air in my lungs just-vanished. All of it, sucked out in an instant.

A silver chain of nothingness wrapped around my chest, squeezing, tightening, strangling me in a way I couldn't fight, couldn't escape. I couldn't breathe.

No. No m

I had

at this go on.

O

To catch her.

To make her real again.

Aria's POV

"Take the

I stare

"Tal

ertain I'd misheard. My ears must be playing tricks on me. There was no way-

if you still want to save your dad."

ice. Flat. Final. The kind of tone that didn't leave room for questions, for hesitation

but obedience.

understood.

humiliation.

here-the transparent glass wall behind him, the office beyond it a blur of movement.

he was going to do this to me here.

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 50

Atia's POV

“Ha...”

A bitter laugh scraped out of my throat, hollow even to my own ears. I couldn't stop the question

that slipped out, pathetic and small. “Can't we just go to the lounge...”

A flicker of something crossed his face. Impatience. Pure, razor-sharp impatience.

“Aria.” My name from his lips, clipped and cutting. “I don't repeat myself.”

“Right here. Take. Them. Off.”

Each word landed like a whip crack.

I met his gaze-cold, merciless, utterly indifferent to what this was costing me-and something inside me cracked. Not broke. Just... cracked. Enough to let the despair seep in.

My throat tightened until it burned. Metallic. Bitter. The taste of swallowed blood, of swallowed pride, of everything I'd already given up and still had left to lose.

My hands lifted. They felt like they belonged to someone else-heavy, foreign, trembling just enough to betray me.

The first button slipped through my fingers once before I managed to catch it. I worked it free anyway. Then the next. Then the next.

One by one.

I didn't look at him. I couldn't. I stared somewhere past his shoulder, at the blurred shapes moving beyond the glass, and felt the last shred of something I'd been clinging to slip away.

He was going to take this from me too.

And I was going to let him.

My clothes were gone. Every last piece, stripped away until there was nothing left to hide behind. The first layer of humiliation was over.

And then came the rest.

He dragged me against his chest-hard, unyielding, like I weighed nothing. The impact knocked the breath from my lungs, and suddenly his scent was everywhere.

Pine and smoke and something darker, something purely him, flooding my senses.

Our bodies pressed so close I could hear everything-the rough, uneven rhythm of his breath the whisper of blood rushing through his veins, the low, guttural growl of his wolf thick with w

He wanted me.

I knew it the way I knew my own heartbeat. Instinct. The pull of mate to mate, bone-deep and ancient.

This should have been something else. A surrender, not a violation. A claiming, not a breaking. should have been the kind of desperate, consuming need that left us both breathless and satis

If everything hadn't

If he hadn't just

His presence

My body k

what my

between us.

o the edge and watched me fall.

me-overwhelming, suffocating. I instinctively shrank back.

as supposed to do. But my body had also learned to be afraid of him. A

nat my body remembered, wasn't desire.

It was

move." His voice dropped low, his grip tightening. His scent flooded the air with anger, with heat, with possession.

heartbeat against my chest, strong and relentless. The heat of his palm seared in ached over me, inch by inch, burning like he wanted to leave marks.

and was at the back of my neck, gripping tight, and his mouth was on mine. His tongue ep, moving in a rhythm that was brutal, claiming, relentless. It hurt. But beneath the hurt, else stirred-something familiar, something shameful. Pleasure I didn't ask for, didn't couldn't stop.

The word screamed inside my head, desperate and hopeless. My hands pressed against his chest, pushing, trying to stop this-this whole twisted thing-when-

his hand slid between my thighs. His fingers found the places that made me forget how to think, pressing and teasing-hard, then soft, then hard again./

Hmm..."

strange, indescriba

in ways I hate

he didn't

My body tensed beneath him, betraying

him deeper, moving inside me.

He made me into nothing, my body going soft, my breathing

completely ragged.

"N-no... don't... Damon, please..."

"Don't?" His voice dropped dangerously low. "Aria, you said it yourself-you'd do anything."

"Ah-"

+25 Paint

gripped the edge of the desk, my whole body trembling uncontrollably as I pleaded, my voice

shaking. "Please... at least... at least not here... can we go to the lounge... please..."

He pulled his fingers out, then wrapped an arm around my waist and spun me around, forcing my back against him, making me face the glass wall that looked into the secretary's office.

His lips brushed close to my ear. "You don't get to choose."

I struggled weakly, but I could only endure the way he took complete control, leaving me no room

to escape.

It reminded me of that night when he was drunk-

The desk... the couch... the floor-to-ceiling window... the lounge...

"You're such a hypocrite." His voice came again, rough against my ear, low and cruel. "You're so wet. Your body is screaming that you want this."

I squeezed my eyes shut. Tears slipped down my cheeks, hot and helpless.

His voice was ice. "Aria, just admit it. This is what you begged for."

Click-

The sound of his belt coming undone. Heartbreaking.

Then he was inside me. A sharp, aching fullness that made me curl into myself, my breath catching on the edge of a whimper.

"Don't-"

My voice came out thin, broken. A moan escaped with it, betraying me again. The word died on my lips as he took over completely-leaving no room to think, no room to breathe. Just the rhythm he set, the way he filled every space I had, the way my own body kept responding in ways I couldn't control.

All I could do was take it.

Beyond the wall-for

didn't care, didn't

The ordinary rhythm of a world that didn't know,