

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 51

Aria's POV

Until night fell.

Until every bit of strength in my body was drained.

Until I couldn't even remember how long I'd been asleep.

When I opened my eyes, familiar yet distant décor came into view.

This was the lounge in Damon's office.

"Luna, are you awake?"

Justin's voice came from outside the door. He knocked again.

I snapped back to reality and immediately tried to get up-but the moment I moved, a sharp, bone-deep ache spread through my body, along with an intense soreness between my legs. The pain I couldn't ignore reminded me with every small movement of what had happened.

I tried to move and immediately froze, a sharp ache shooting through my body, forcing a quiet gasp from me.

"Justin, wait a second, please."

I finally sat up and forced myself to endure the pain as I looked around for something to wear-but aside from the tissues scattered on the floor, silent evidence of how wild last night had been, there

was nothing.

That's when I remembered-my clothes were all outside.

And he had torn them apart.

My temples throbbed.

Luckily, I knew Damon always kept spare clothes in the lounge. I stumbled over to the closet, grabbed one of his white shirts, and put it on.

The hem barely reached mid-thigh.

“Justin.” I opened the door.

He froze for a brief second when he saw me standing there in Damon’s shirt, bare-legged, but quickly recovered and handed me the bag in his hand.

“Luna, your clothes. Mr. Hawthorne asked for them to be brought from home. Amy already ironed

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them.”

Heat rushed to my face. I took the bag. “...Thank you, Justin.”

“It’s my duty, Luna. No need to thank me.”

I pressed my lips together, lowering my gaze-and then noticed something else in the bag.

Besides the clothes... there was a box.

My eyes went still for a moment as I took it out.

The words “birth control pills” hit me instantly.

“Luna, Alpha asked me to remind you...” Justin’s gaze flicked to the box. He hesitated, then

continued, “Don’t forget to take it.”

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My face went pale. After a moment, I said quietly, “He didn’t just ask you to remind me, did he? He

asked you to make sure I actually take it... right?”

Justin stayed silent.

Tunderstood everything.

Damon never allowed anything-or anyone-to slip out of his control.

And what happened yesterday... was the one thing he hadn't controlled.

We hadn't used any protection.

I tore open the package, pushed a small white pill out of the foil, and without hesitation, put it in my mouth and swallowed it dry.

"You can report back to him now."

Justin clearly didn't expect me to take it so directly. His expression grew more complicated as he

looked at me.

"Thank you for your cooperation, Luna."

Then he turned and left.

Only after his figure completely disappeared from the office did I finally lose my strength.

"Aria..." I told myself desperately, clinging to the last thread of clarity.

He doesn't love you.

He just wants to own you and show you his cruelty and ruthlessness.

I staggered two steps, bracing myself against the door frame before slowly sinking down

Damon's POV

Justin pushed the door open. Alpha, Lans took the medication and has already left"

did she say I asked, folding the documents in my hands.

In't say anything"

d froze mid ar

ag?

rge of anger-urbidden, unwanted-flooded my chest.

wept the files aside, papers scattering across the desk, and stood. My office. My space.
And

he'd been in it.

I didn't look back as I headed for the door. Justin My voice came out flat, controlled.
"Replace everything she touched."

"Yes, Alpha

Justin followed closely behind as we stepped into the elevator. "Alpha, after Ronan Grayson's medical parole request was approved, he was transferred early this morning to the special ward at the pack hospital."

"Should we have the expert team we contacted earlier take over?"

"When did you start asking me these things?" I said sharply.

Justin instinctively lowered his head and took a step back.

"1... I'm sorry, Alpha, I'll have the team withdraw immediately."

"When did I say anything about withdrawing them?" The elevator stopped at the basement level, and I shot him a cold glance.

He straightened immediately, bowing slightly.

"No, no... I mean, have there

"Do whatever you wan

epped out of t

ment right away."

Aria's POV

Exhaustion pulled at every muscle, every bone, but I couldn't stay there-not for another secon My head was chaos-thoughts crashing, breaking, reforming into nothing I could name.

I pulled on the clothes Justin had left. Grabbed my bag. Walked out.

Hawthorne Group loomed behind me, and I didn't look back.-

?

de, I stood by the entrance, my mind spinning in useless circles. Home to the Silvermoon

I pulled out my phone. Ord days ago. I'd barely used

didn't smell like him.

Sleep came fast. O

When I opened body heavy a

still runni

I sat u

My apartment-the one Astrid had helped me buy just

w, all I wanted was somewhere quiet. Somewhere that

couldn't tell anymore.

was soaked. Tears. My face was wet, my head pounding, my un a marathon I never signed up for. Or maybe I had. Maybe I wa

the lamp-click-light. Too bright. I pulled the curtains open and

froz

e sun was already sinking, the sky bruised purple and gray. I'd lost the

arched. Like I hadn't had anything to drink in years.

at's what I needed.

st touched the glass when-

ned.

opped.

be coming here now

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Chapter 52

Chains

Aria's POV

I turned toward the door, and before I could see who it was, a familiar voice reached my ears.

“Your phone’s been off, so I had to get my brother to do some digging. That’s when I found out you left Hawthorne Group this morning. I called your house and your office-no one had seen you.”

Astrid’s face broke into a relieved smile as she stepped in and slipped on her shoes. “I had a feeling you’d be here.”

“Sorry for worrying you. I didn’t check my phone-it probably died.”

I stepped forward to take the bags from her hands. Looking down saw she’d brought beer, drinks, and snacks. “You-”

“Isn’t it obvious? We’re celebrating your dad’s situation getting resolved! No going home sober tonight! I’ll drink, and you get soda.” Astrid moved the small coffee table in the living room to the side, then sat cross-legged on the floor.

My dad was getting resolved?

Damon actually kept his word.

A dull, aching pain bloomed in my chest-raw and bitter. But that was fine. That was fine. I’d traded my body, my dignity, my pride... for my father’s safety.

I didn’t lose. Not really.

“What are you standing there for? Aria?”

I blinked. Astrid’s voice pulled me back to reality.

“Come look at what you want to eat. When I got here, your lights were still off. I’m guessing you haven’t eaten all day, have you? You just recovered from that ulcer-you can’t keep doing this to yourself.”

Astrid waved her phone at me, showing a food delivery app. “This fried chicken looks good-let’s get some. And that salad you like, and some beef!”

“Coming.”

I walked over and sat across from her. The ache in my chest didn’t go anywhere, but at least I wasn’t alone with it anymore.

“Come on, pick what you want to eat.” She shoved the phone toward me and smiled.

That smile. Too big. Too bright. Almost fake-like a mask that didn't quite fit.

Astrid was trying to comfort me. Whatever had happened, she knew enough to guess, but she

she wouldn't upset me.

"Astrid," said softly, "If you want to ask, I can tell you."

A

Claim

Astrid's smile faltered. She took back the phone, scrolling through the app with her head down, mumbling, "I'd rather not ask. I'm just worried... worried about you!"

"Astrid... I'm fine, really."

"Don't you dare lie to me!" Her voice cracked, that too-wide smile finally slipping. Her eyes were red and brimming with tears.

"You have no idea! When Marcus told me you got pushed out of the window, I wanted to run up there and kill that bastard! How could he do that to you?"

She broke down, clutching the phone. "But I knew if I had charged in, you would've stopped me. Not because you care about him, 'but... You had no choice."

I couldn't help hugging her, crying. "I'm fine. Really, I'm fine."

Really.

I lied to myself.

His marks. Still on me. The rope burns from the fall still raw across my ribs. Every bruise a word I couldn't speak. Every welt a piece of my pride, crushed, crumbled, gone.

I could feel her seeing it all.

I sucked in air. Forced the corner of my mouth up. Wiped my cheeks-dry, be dry-and pretended I wasn't falling apart.

"Alright. Stop. Your eyes will get puffy." I pulled two beers from the bag, opened them, and handed one to

Astrid.

“Come on, tonight we’ll drink together. No leaving until we’re drunk!”

“You’re crazy! What about your stomach? No alcohol today-remember?”

Astrid sat up straight, tears still wet on her face, not even bothering to wipe them away. Her hand shot out -grabbed my wrist, snatched the beer from my fingers like I was a child reaching for something dangerous.

Then she was digging through the bag. A can appeared. Pressed into my palm.

“Here. Drink this. Coconut water.” Her eyes locked onto mine, fierce and red-rimmed.

“You want to be reckless? Fine. But I’m not following you down that road.”

“I need you around. For a long time.” Her voice cracked. “Otherwise-who’s going to be my maid of honor? Who’s going to cry with me when my heart gets broken?”

water she pressed into my hand and couldn’t help laughing.

ly, “Aria, no matter what happened yesterday, just remember-starting now,

-rebirth!”

Hours later.

Astrid passed out drunk on the couch, completely knocked out. I pulled out my phone and saw a ton of messages piled up.

I skimmed through the messages, picking out a few important ones to reply to. Then-a notification popped up. One I’d set for myself ages ago.

Tomorrow, 7:00 p.m. sharp. Duran’s birthday banquet. Don’t forget.

I showed up at the pack hospital super early the next morning and waited for him right outside the inpatient building.

The third building in the inpatient area is where they keep all the prisoners who applied for medical parole. It’s completely separate from the rest of the hospital, and the security is extremely strict.

Noah reached into his white coat, pulled out a work badge, and handed it to me. “Aria, remember-you can only stay for half an hour, max.”

“That’s enough. Thank you, Noah.”

“Go on. I’ll wait for you out here.”

I nodded. Took a deep breath. Then turned and walked toward the entrance of the third building.

The badge beeped me through security. Easy.

Then I was there. Room 503. My hand on the cold metal handle, and I froze.

I couldn’t turn it. Couldn’t push the door open. Couldn’t even breathe.

I was right there, but I couldn’t make myself go in. Couldn’t face whatever was waiting on the other side.

“Cough... cough, cough-”

The sound came through the door, sharp and wet. It snapped me out of it.

Then-the crash of glass shattering, hitting the floor.

“Dad!”

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Chapter 53

Aria’s POV

I threw the door open and rushed in.

Claim

There he was. One hand clutching his chest, the other gripping the edge of the hospital bed like it was the only thing keeping him upright. Shards of glass-a cup, his cup-scattered everywhere.

“Aria?” His eyes went wide. Shock. Pure, unfiltered shock. “Sweetie, how did you-”

The pieces were everywhere. Broken. Sharp. My chest ached.

Then he laughed. A small, shaky laugh. “Heh. Dad’s hand slipped. Just couldn’t hold onto it.”

He started to bend down to pick up the pieces himself.

“No-don’t-” I was already moving. I stopped him. “I’ll clean it up. Dad, please. Get back in bed and rest.”

I stayed quiet while I picked up the big shards and tossed them in the trash, then used paper towels to wipe the floor over and over.

I couldn’t remember how many times I’d wiped.

The water was gone. The floor was clean. Spotless.

But my hand kept moving. Kept wiping. Kept scrubbing.

I couldn’t stop. Couldn’t make myself stand up. Couldn’t make myself look at him. Because if I stopped-if I let my hands go still-then I’d have to feel something terrible. And I didn’t know if I could survive that.

I just knew for sure that I couldn’t lose him.

“Aria, that’s enough,” Dad sighed. He took the paper towels out of my hand. “You came to see me. You’re not here just to clean the floor, right?”

I looked up at him. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw the IV needle still stuck in the back of his band.

The tears just started falling before I could stop them.

He quietly moved that hand behind his back. “I’m doing fine. Don’t worry about me.”

“You’re still trying to lie to me!”

“I’ve never lied to you. Not once.” His voice was firm. Too firm. “If you don’t believe me, you can go ask the doctor. Those experts-your people brought them in, didn’t they?”

“Experts?” I blinked, confused.

“You didn’t know? Didn’t Damon tell you? He reached out to the Pack Alliance expert team and had them take over my treatment.”

Damon?

He was the one who got the Pack Alliance experts for Dad?

Why would he-

Ding.

Ctaem

The sound sliced through my thoughts. My phone. The countdown. The one I'd set before I walked through the door.

Half an hour was almost up.

I pushed the thoughts down. Buried them. Not now.

I turned to Dad. "Dad, I came today because I wanted to see you-but there's actually something else I need to ask you about."

I took a breath.

"Do you remember Harrison Cole? The temp worker on that project two years ago. One of the victims."

Dad's brow furrowed. Confusion flickered across his face. "I heard he was the reason my medical parole got denied." He looked at me, searching. "Why? What's going on with him?"

"I think there's someone behind him."

Dad frowned. "What makes you think that?"

I skipped over some details and just told him about going to see Harrison Cole on my own.

"So you think this person doesn't actually have a grudge against our family? He's just using us as a tool to get what he really wants? Like what?"

"Covering up a murder," I said.

Dad's face got serious right away. Then he shook his head. "That's impossible. I never plotted to hurt anyone. Who would I need to silence?"

"It doesn't have to be something you planned together."

I paused for a second, then asked, "Dad, when you were at Grayson Group, you got tons of documents every day. Did you actually read through each one carefully before you signed?"

"Of course not. If I had to check every little detail on every-" He stopped mid-sentence as it suddenly hit

him.

“You’re saying... this person wants me dead because something he’s trying to hide went through my hands?”

“Dad devou have any guesses who it might be?”

when suddenly, he grabbed my wrist.

I don’t want you digging any deeper.”

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“But if we don’t find them, what if next time-”

“Promise me, Aria.”

I could feel it-the fear beneath his grip. This wasn’t control. It was terror.

“Okay.” I pressed my lips tight, gave a small nod, and walked out.

Noah was waiting for me at the entrance of Building 3.

“How’s Uncle Ronan doing?” he asked.

“He’s okay.”

Claim

“Good. Now you can relax a bit. The expert team is here. With them on the case, Uncle’s condition should be under control.”

I nodded, but my mind was somewhere else. “Noah, I want to see Harrison Cole.”

He looked surprised for a second, then said, “If he’s still in the hospital, you can just go. But his family checked him out yesterday. They said they’re taking him to another hospital.”

“Can you find out which one?”

He shook his head. “They did a regular discharge. No transfer paperwork. It could be anywhere. Why? What are you planning?”

“Never mind,” I exhaled, the weight of the morning finally catching up. I’d have to park this thought for now.

“Hey, stop overthinking,” Noah said, his voice dropping to a gentle, grounding hum. “You haven’t even had breakfast yet, have you? Come on, I’m taking you somewhere.”

He led me into a hidden courtyard, a sanctuary tucked away from the city's noise. At its heart sat a small, still lake that mirrored the morning sky.

"One of the hospital staff's family runs this place," Noah whispered as he pulled out a chair for me. "The first time I stepped in here, I just knew... you'd like it here."

He slid the menu toward me, his fingers lingering on the edge of the paper. "What do you feel like eating?"

"Surprise me," I leaned back, letting the serenity of the water wash over me. "You know the place better

than I do."

"Fair enough. Trust me, I've got a feeling I know exactly what you'll like." He flashed a confident grin and signaled the waiter.

I started to smile back, but then—a flicker of movement. Out of the corner of my eye, two silhouettes sharpened into focus. My breath hitched.

Then came the voice.

Aria, what a coincidence! You're eating here too," Claudia said. Her eyes flicked back and forth between

oh and me, and I caught this shady little spark in them.

was just asking Damon if you'd be coming to his mom's birthday party tonight, right, Damon?"

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Damon stared at me with those dark, heavy eyes and didn't say a word.

Somments

Claim

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Chapter 54

Aria's POV

His gaze darkened the second he got close.

I knew exactly why-there was another male wolf scent on me. He was furious.

Clam

When I looked up and met his eyes, I could feel the marks he'd left on my body two days ago starting to burn again. Like they were reminding me of everything that had happened in his office.

is your friend, right? Aren't you going to introduce him to Damon and me?" Claudia looked Noah on, her tone dripping with fake sweetness.

A man and woman eating alone together in a quiet little place like this-who would believe we're friends?

her a cold look. She shifted nervously, her eyes darting away.

Noah Hargreaves," Noah said smoothly. "I grew up next door to Aria. We're neighbors and friends."

A sly look flashed across Claudia's face. She immediately turned to Damon. "Damon, do you know Mr. Hargreaves? Aria's never mentioned him before."

Damon finally pulled his gaze off me and glanced at Noah.

Noah extended his hand first. "Mr. Hawthorne. Didn't expect to run into you again so soon."

Claudia's expression froze for a second, then she tilted her head with a sickeningly sweet smile and looked straight at me.

"Oh? Friends? What kind of friends exactly?" She let out a low, wicked little giggle, her eyes sparkling with mischief as she glanced at Damon.

Damon didn't say a word, but his presence hit the table like a sudden drop in temperature. The air grew thick, suffocatingly heavy with hostility he didn't bother to hide.

He reached out, his handshake with Noah a study in icy politeness. Then his attention snapped to me.

"Tissues." His voice was sharp, like he was ordering around one of his employees.

I didn't move. But Claudia pulled out two tissues and handed them to him.

He took

front of everyone, slowly and deliberately started wiping his fingers.

didn't hold back and blurted it out.

expression he'd worn two days ago when he watched me undress.

the rest of my words got stuck.

stood before me crashed down like a physical weight. This was the Alpha of the

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Silvermoon Pack-a man who could end a life with a casual flick of his wrist.

But Noah? He was just a doctor, a healer with no defense against a predator like this. I couldn't let my mess become his death sentence.

Clam

My neck burned with the urge to look away, and before I could stop myself, I tucked my chin and averted my gaze. It was the ancient, submissive reflex of our kind-silent surrender to a superior.

It felt cowardly, a bitter pill to swallow, but had no choice. Survival demanded it.

But he wasn't done with me. He let out a low "Hmm?" his voice rising slightly at the end.

"What are you trying to say?"

I pressed my lips together tightly. I didn't want to cause any more drama, so I stayed quiet. Instead, I grabbed two more tissues, reached over, and took Damon's right hand. I started wiping it myself.

"You missed a spot," I said lightly.

An invisible act of revenge.

Damon was obsessed with cleanliness-actually, he was obsessed with me being clean. Except when we were in bed, he never held my hand.

I looked back at Damon with my most innocent expression and blinked at him. "What's wrong?"

We stared at each other for a long moment. Finally, he looked away, his eyes blazing with anger, and dropped one last line in a low voice: "Don't forget to show up on time for my mom's birthday party tonight."

Then he turned and walked away. Claudia shot me a venomous glare and quickly followed him.

Night fell. The Maybach parked in front of the Hawthornes' old mansion.

Justin came over and opened the back door. "Luna, Alpha said you can go in first. He has something to take care of and will be here shortly."

I nodded, gathered my skirt, and stepped out of the car, then headed toward the banquet hall.

I'd only taken a few steps when I suddenly heard Caleb's voice behind me:

"Hey, Aria!"

His voice hit me, and just like that-I was back there. That booth. Caleb on the phone. Damon's hand on my throat, making me moan for him like-

God. My stomach churned. I was burning with shame, frustration, everything I'd been trying to bury. I wanted to disappear. Dig a hole. Crawl inside and never come out.

And then he jogged right over. Stopped next to me. Right there. Exactly where I'd been praying he wouldn't be.

"Aria, you look beautiful tonight."

Caleb in sharp gray suit, smiling at me like nothing had ever happened.

I caught the way his eyes lingered-just a beat too long-and I cleared my throat quickly, pretending I

needed to shift the gift to my other hand.

"Thanks." I took half a step back. Just enough to breathe. "Everyone's waiting inside. I should head in."

"Of course."

I slipped past him and walked quickly. Finally. Air. Space. I could breathe again.

I thought I was free.

Then Caleb caught up and grabbed my arm. "Aria, wait."

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Claim

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 55

Aria's POV

I jerked away without thinking. Stepped back. Straightened up.

Caleb froze for a second, then ducked his head-quick, almost guilty-looking.

“Sorry, Aria. I just wanted to help you carry that.”

I tucked the gift bag behind my back. “Was there something else?”

Claus

“About last time...” He paused, looking uncomfortable. “Aria, you don’t have to be so nervous around me. I didn’t hear anything, okay? Don’t worry about it.”

Didn’t hear anything...?

So that’s what this was about. He had heard. Of course he had. He just wanted me to pretend it never happened.

Those words just... ripped the lid off everything. Everything I’d tried so hard to bury came flooding back, drowning me, pulling me under until I couldn’t even breathe.

I forced a smile onto my lips. It took everything I had. “Got it. I need to go.”

With that, I grabbed the hem of my dress and practically ran.

No question about it-Damon’s mom, Madam Duran, was the center of attention. Even after his dad died, even with her keeping a lower profile, every pack bigshot and their mates still flocked to her, falling over themselves to wish her well.

I took a deep breath, trying to calm my racing heart-still pounding from shame-and stepped forward.

Give the gift. Smile. Show off those Grayson manners. Leave.

Simple.

That was the plan. I was just about to execute it,

I lifted my skirt, ready to move. Then Claudia brushed right past my shoulder and hurried toward the center of the hall.

Both hands clutching some little fancy box. And that voice. That sickly sweet, fake-as-hell voice.

“Madam Duran, happy birthday! I know how much you love moonstones. I saw this necklace at an auction overseas and immediately thought of you, so I bought it on the spot. I hope you like it.”

The whole room erupted in oohs and ahhs.

Someone whispered, “That stone must have cost a fortune!”

Claudia just smiled proudly. “Nothing’s too good for Madam Duran.” Then she gave a little satisfied smirk,

looking around like she’d just won first place.

She sure loves putting on a show, Lydia sneers in my head.

Yeah. She’s great at picking her moments: And even better at pretending.

Claimy

Duran took the box and held up the sparkling moonstone necklace for everyone to see. “Oh, thank you, Claudia, dear. You were thinking of me even while you were away.”

“How could I ever forget how good you’ve been to me?” Claudia gave that sweet, innocent smile of hers.

Then, out of nowhere, she stumbled back two steps, like she couldn’t control herself. She slapped a hand over her stomach and started dry-heaving.

“Oh my God, sweetheart, what’s wrong?” Duran asked, immediately concerned. She grabbed Claudia’s arm to steady her. “Come on, sit down and rest.”

She frowned, worry creasing her features. “What’s the matter? Did you eat something that didn’t agree with you?”

“I...” Claudia looked around, like she was deciding whether to speak.

Madam Duran caught on right away. She turned to the other guests. “Could you give us a moment?”

The guests exchanged glances, then got up and filed out of the lounge.

“Sweetheart, they’re gone. You can tell me now.” Madam Duran studied her, then her eyes dropped to Claudia’s stomach, like a lightbulb had just gone off.

“Claudia... are you pregnant?”

Claudia lowered her head. “I’m sorry, Madam... yes, am.”

As she said it, she shot me a look out of the corner of her eye.

That look-smug, triumphant, full of contempt.

“Why are you apologizing, silly girl? That’s wonderful news!” Madam Duran rubbed her back and brushed the hair from her forehead. “Tell me, is the baby Damon’s?”

Claudia didn’t deny it. Instead, she put on that pitiful expression and said in a shaky, tearful voice, “Madam Duran, I don’t want to make things difficult for Damon... especially since he and Aria...”

“That doesn’t matter!” Duran cut her off, shooting a glance my way. “If that baby is Damon’s, I can have them divorced. You should come back to where you’ve always belonged.”

“The most important thing right now is for you to take good care of yourself, carry this baby to term, and then marry Damon in a beautiful ceremony. Don’t worry about anything else, alright?”

Claudia nodded, all sweet and obedient.

guests had arrived. A servant’s reminder came from outside the door. Madam Duran stood up, ressed, and smiled. “Sweetheart, you rest here. There are too many people coming and going

for some clumsy person to bump into you.”

Then she looked at me.

The meaning was crystal clear.

I almost laughed. Whatever.

I turned around, dropped my gift on the nearest table-didn't care where-then pushed open the terrace door and stepped outside.

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Chapter 56

Aria's POV

"I'll make her divorce Damon!"

Duran's cold words kept looping in my head. That look she gave me-like I was some kind of criminal who'd wrecked her perfect family. She's never liked me. Not once. Not for a single second.

Whatever. I don't have time to dwell on that right now.

I yanked off the heavy hoop skirt and carried it as I paced back and forth along the garden path. Dad's words from earlier today just kept spinning around in my head.

Someone wants Dad dead.

They tried using Harrison Cole this time, and it failed. That means there will definitely be a next time.

The scary part? We're all out in the open. If we don't find out who's behind this soon, we're going to be sitting ducks.

But Harrison Cole has completely disappeared. Every lead we had? Stone cold.

Clum

I kept feeling like I was missing something huge-something right in front of my face-but no matter how hard I tried, I couldn't figure out what it was.

Then, while I was lost in thought, a woman dressed like one of the maids came hurrying toward me from the other end of the path. She was carrying this enormous tray loaded with glasses of red wine.

Crash!

The whole tray smashed right in front of me. Red wine exploded everywhere-all over my face, my neck, my dress.

“Oh! I’m so sorry! I’m so sorry, Luna!” The maid stumbled backward, looking totally freaked out. “I didn’t mean to! It was an accident!” She kept apologizing and reached out like she was going to wipe my dress

with her bare hands.

“It’s fine. Just leave.”

In that second, her face froze. Then she quickly dropped her head and started crying in this shaky little voice. “Luna, I... I really didn’t mean it. It’s all my fault. I ruined your beautiful dress...”

I sighed. “I said it’s fine. Just go.”

“No!” She suddenly jumped up from the ground and slapped herself hard across the face.

Slap!

“I’m sorry, Luna! It’s all my fault!”

She raised her hand to slap herself again.

I stared at her. Something was off.

I grabbed her wrist. My voice was calm. “It’s not entirely your fault. Are you new here? I don’t think I’ve seen you before.”

Claim

She let out a shaky breath of relief. “Yes, Luna. I’m new.” She twisted her hands nervously. “Why don’t I take you upstairs to change into a clean dress?”

She kept sneaking glances at my face while she spoke. When I nodded, she turned around quickly and led me out of the garden.

The changing room was on the second floor of the banquet hall. Damon’s mom always sets it up every year-racks of extra dresses for guests who need them.

“Luna, take your time picking whatever you like,” the maid said sweetly.”

Bang!

The door slammed shut behind me.

I pretended to browse through the fancy dresses on the two racks slowly, running my fingers over the fabric.

Then I said, "Claudia, you can come out now."

No answer.

"If you'd rather not come out, I'm just going to leave."

I turned around, grabbed the door handle, and cracked the door open just a tiny bit. That's when I heard a footstep behind me.

"How did you know it was me?"

I slowly turned around and looked straight at her.

"Because only you would try something this stupid. Spill wine on me to trap me here? Pathetic trick, Claudia. Grow up."

Claudia's face twisted with anger. "Aria, you think you're so smart? So what if you figured it out? You still came anyway. Guess you're not that clever after all."

I stepped closer until I was right in front of her. "I came because there's something I've been wondering about for a long time. And I still can't figure it out."

I let the words hang there. Watched her face.

She took

inactively. Her back bumped into the clothes rack behind her.

don't know what you mean!" Her voice was shaking, but her eyes flashed

took one more calm step forward. "You told me once my dad died, my

ered nervously. "S-so what? Was I wrong?"

Claim

"Just from those words alone? Yeah, you weren't wrong. But here's the thing-how come right after you said all that, my dad actually got into trouble?"

Claudia's eyes widened Then she quickly put on that perfect innocent face-surprised, wronged, totally shocked.

“Did you drink too much tonight, Arja?” She raised her voice deliberately. “I don’t know what you’re talking about! I was just angry that day. You’re overthinking everything!” She paused. “And what proof do you even have that this has anything to do with your dad’s medical parole?”

I let out a soft laugh.

“Claudia.” I lowered my voice. Leaned in close to her ear. “Who told you my dad was having problems with his medical parole?”

Claudia’s face went completely white.

Clan

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 57

Aria’s POV

Her mouth opened, but no words came out.

The loud party music and laughter from outside suddenly seemed deafening in the quiet room.

It took her forever to answer.

“I... I was just guessing, okay?”

Claudia tried to yank her hand away and stumbled back two steps. She wouldn’t even look at me. That look-dodging, avoiding-made every suspicion I had feel absolutely certain.

I raised my voice, sharp and clear: “The person behind Harrison Cole was you, wasn’t it?”

“Let go of me! Let g

“Answer me, Cla

“Say it!”

nd screamed in complete panic:

She ripp

“Ye

?Aria, you always think you’re so damn smart, right? How come you’re only

ose words. The second they left her mouth, my fists started shaking.

cold, bitter laugh. “Why? Because you’re sitting in the spot that should’ve been mine! If it

ou and your stupid dad, I would’ve been Mrs. Hawthorne two years ago! You both deserve to we me everything!”

my hand and slapped her hard across the face.

claudia’s head snapped to the side. A bright red handprint bloomed on her cheek. She froze for a second, then glared at me like she’d completely lost it and lunged straight at me.

“Aria Grayson!”

I was ready. I caught her swinging wrist mid-air.

“That slap was f

I stared st

“And t

<Chapter 55

Slap!

“That’s for the old me who was too stupid to see what you really were!”

Clarm

Claudia covered her face with one hand while the other flew up like a shield. Her voice came out shrill and ugly: “Ah! Aria, how dare you hit me! I’m telling Damon! He won’t let you get away with this!”

Two bright red handprints stood out on her pale cheeks like someone had painted them there.

“Claudia, my dad doesn’t owe you a single thing, and neither do I.”

“You keep saving I ruined your chance with Damon two years ago, but let’s get one thing straight-you’re the one

umped him so you could climb higher.”

h

s no idea, does he? What do you think he’ll feel when he finds out his precious girl tossed
o get ahead?”

one hand pressed to her face, breathing hard. Her other hand shook in the air, still
gripping

closer, lowering my voice to barely a whisper. “Still dreaming about being Mrs.
Hawthorne?”

nic on her face-she couldn’t hide it anymore.

en I get upset, I just say whatever pops into my head.” I let the words hang there for a
second. “So-”

Claudia Stone.” I said her name slowly, deliberately. “Next time you want to pull
something, you’d better think really hard about whether you can handle what comes
after.”

Her face twisted with rage. “Damon won’t believe you!

She glared at me, eyes burning with pure hatred.

“You can try it and find out.” I didn’t wait for her to respond. I turned around, yanked the
changing-room door open, and walked out. I was done wasting my time on her.

I’d only gone a few steps when I heard quick footsteps rushing up behind me.

“Aria!”

I spun around instinctively. Claudia had run out after me, tears streaming down her face.
She dropped to her knees with a loud thud right in front of me and grabbed both my legs
tightly.

“Aria, please, I’m begging you. Please let me be with Damon. I really love him!”

I looked down at her “What kind of show are you putting on now?”

Claudia

“A

s she stared up at me.

have Damon, I'll do anything you want!"

shoved it toward me. "This is fifty million. I know you said you
e, but I really can't get that much right now. This is every cent I have. I'm giving it
all to you! I'll figure out the rest later!"

-“Please, Arla. For all the times I was there for you back then, just give Damon back to me.
I love him,

okay?”

Astrid was totally right. Claudia's biggest talent is having zero shame.

Claim

Back in school, it was always me giving her whatever she asked for. Now she's acting like
she was the one doing all favors.

“Lev

ed her fingers off my legs one by one.

ard the stairs.

ut a piercing scream right behind me. My body spun around on its own. There she was,
leaning the railing.

pitiful, begging look from a second ago was completely gone. She stared at me with this
smug little he playing on her lips. She slowly wiped the tears off her face, then looked at
me again.

his time, there was no desperation in her eyes at all.

Aria, you lose.”

Then she flipped herself over the railing and jumped.

“Claudia!”

I lunged forward and tried to grab her. Right when my fingers were about to catch her
dress, she slapped my hand away.

All I managed to catch was the phone that slipped out of her fingers.

The screen was still lit, showing an active call with Damon.

“Claudia!”

Damon’s worried voice crackled through the speaker,

Thud!

A heavy, sickening crash echoed from downstairs.

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 58

Aria’s POV

Claim

My brain went completely blank. My heart was pounding so hard it felt like it might burst from my chest.

She actually jumped! Is she going to die? Lydia’s voice cried out anxiously in my head.

I don’t know... why the hell would she do something like that?!

My hand holding the phone froze mid-air.

Damon’s voice was still shouting through the speaker, but I couldn’t hear anything anymore.

I stood at the top of the stairs and looked down. A massive pool of blood was spreading rapidly beneath Claudia, soaking into her dress. She lay there, twitching and writhing on the ground.

“Oh God! She killed her!”

“Call an ambulance! Hurry!”

“There’s so much blood!”

Screams erupted from the crowd below.

Footsteps came rushing from every direction.

This was all Claudia's setup. Every single bit of it.

She didn't just want to ruin my reputation or steal the Luna position.

She wanted to destroy me completely.

A few minutes later, a familiar figure came sprinting into view. Damon. He ran straight to her, dropped down, and scooped Claudia into his arms. She leaned weakly against him.

"Damon... Damon, my... my baby..."

"Claudia, don't talk. It's going to be okay. Everything will be okay!"

Right before he turned to leave, he looked up at me with eyes as cold as ice. I stood there helplessly by the railing where she had jumped.

"It wasn't me..." I opened my mouth without thinking.

But before I could finish, he was already carrying her away from the bloody floor. His gaze lingered on me for half a second, then turned even colder.

"If anything happens to that child..." His voice was loud and furious. "I won't let this go."

All the strength left my body instantly. A heavy, stabbing pain spread through my chest, making it hard to breathe.

"Aria!" A sharp scream.

Chem

Almost at the same moment, while I was still staring at Damon's retreating figure and the giant pool of blood on the floor, Damon's mom came rushing up the stairs with two servants.

She was breathing hard, one hand on her hip, the other gripping the railing. The sharp scent of her anger hit me before she even stepped in front of me.

Slap!

A loud smack landed across my face without warning. My head snapped to the side. I tasted blood in my mouth, and my ears started ringing.

"She jumped by herself," I said, covering my burning cheek.

“Don’t you dare!” Damon’s mother screamed, her voice shaking with rage. “You tried to kill someone on my birthday? Right in front of everyone? You tried to kill a pregnant woman! How evil are you? I never knew you could be this heartless and cruel!”

“I didn’t kill anyone!” My voice trembled but stayed steady. “Claudia jumped by herself!”

Before she could interrupt me, I continued:

“If I really wanted her dead,” I looked her straight in the eyes, “she wouldn’t have even made it past the railing.”

“Shut up!” She shrieked. “Thank the Moon Goddess Damon got there in time. If anything happens to our Hawthorne family’s grandchild... Aria Grayson, I will make you pay with your life!”

“I didn’t do it,” I said, meeting her eyes. “Believe me or don’t.”

She raised her hand again. “Call security! What are you waiting for? Arrest this evil woman right now! I want her to pay with her life!”

“Madam Duran,” one servant said quietly, head down, “Alpha Damon gave orders before he left. No one is

allowed to leave until he returns...”

Damon’s mom was breathing heavily. She lifted her hand to slap me again, but she used too much force and suddenly started falling backward.

I instinctively reached out to catch her.

“How dare you! You want to kill me too?!” she yelled.

She violently shoved my hand away. I stumbled back.

“Fine!” She shouted. “Someone, get over here! Throw this murderer into the pack dungeon! No one is allowed to let her out without my permission!”

The two servants looked at each other, then finally stepped forward and grabbed my arms.

I tried to fight back, but in the end, they dragged me away.

The moment the heavy iron dungeon door slammed shut and locked behind me, darkness and cold rushed in from all sides. The air smelled stale and moldy. The only light came from a thin crack at the top

of the door.

Claim

+ slid down the rough wall and sat on the cold floor, hugging my knees tightly and burying my face in my

arms.

Outside, it had started pouring rain. The rain pounded against the window like the sky was crying for me.

I couldn't stop seeing that creepy smile on Claudia's face right before she jumped... and that massive pool of blood. Even while she was lying there injured, the look in her eyes showed more victory than pain.

Aria, we lost. Lydia sighed. Now everyone thinks we pushed her. Especially Madam Duran. She totally believes it.

We should've seen this coming. Claudia would do anything to become Luna. She's completely lost it. She was even willing to risk herself-and her own baby.

Come on, we need to think of something, Lydia urged. We have to get out and tell Damon the truth.

I just leaned my head back against the cold wall and closed my eyes.

Lydia, give it up. Damon doesn't believe us. He would never believe us.

All I could do was rest. Just... rest. Save my strength for whatever storm was coming next.

But the rain and wind beat against the window all night long.

I was exhausted and freezing, but I couldn't sleep at all. My whole body was still wound tight, and I couldn't escape everything that had just happened.

Click.

The heavy iron door scraped open. Bright light stabbed straight into my eyes. I jerked upright, blinking hard, and caught his scent before I even saw his face-sharp, clean, and full of anger and danger.

Damon.

Vote

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 59

Aria's POV

He stood over me without saying a word.

But his Alpha presence pressed down on me like a boulder-crushing, suffocating, drowning me.

My head spun, heavy and foggy. I dug my nails into my palm, letting the pain cut through the haze and forcing myself to stay conscious.

"How's Claudia?" I asked.

"She lost the baby." His voice was ice. "Thanks to you."

My whole body went cold.

Not because of Claudia's baby.

But for me. For the hell that was about to swallow me whole.

"I-" I tried to speak-

Claims

His hand shot out and grabbed my jaw, yanking my face up. A low grinding sound-bone against bone. The pain snapped everything into sharp focus.

"Happy now?" His voice was ice cold and dripping with sarcasm. "After everything you did, you finally got rid of the one thing threatening your position. That's what you wanted all along, right?"

"I didn't push her." I couldn't help saying it out loud, even though deep down, I knew Damon wouldn't

believe me.

"Shut the fuck up!"

Of course. I laughed-a desperate, hollow sound.

“There were only two of you. I heard her begging you-offering you money. But you wanted six billion, didn’t you? I heard everything, Aria. Every single word-right before she fell.”

“She threw herself over the railing!”

“Still lying!” He tightened his grip. My knees buckled. I braced myself against the stone wall behind me.

His furious eyes burned with flames that wouldn’t go out.

Then his hand moved to my throat and slammed me back against the wall.

A sharp, searing pain shot through my back. For a moment, I thought my bones were about to shatter.

“She fell by herself?” His voice stayed terrifyingly calm. “Why the hell would she do that?”

His fingers tightened little by little.

My vision started going dark. My throat felt like it was about to snap. His grip ground against my windpipe

Claim

it hurt so bad. His nails dug into my skin. I couldn’t breathe. I used every last bit of strength to try to pry his hand off, clawing and pulling... but it did nothing.

I could feel myself fading. I don’t know how long it lasted-seconds, minutes, I couldn’t tell.

But just when I thought I was really going to die-

His hand finally dropped.

I collapsed to my knees on the cold stone floor

Air. I needed air. I coughed and hacked, sucking in breath after breath.

My chest was full of that shaking, hollow feeling of coming way too close to dying. For a second, just a second, I thought I was safe.

Then his hand was on my arm, dragging me down the hall and shoving me-hard-against the railing.

My body tipped forward. The long drop opened up below me-nothing but empty air and countless silver spikes far below.

“Damon-what the fuck are you doing!”

I grabbed his arm with both hands. He didn’t pull me back. He just looked down at me.

“Last chance. Did you push Claudia?”

The cold, rainy wind whipped through the corridor windows, slapping against my face. His Alpha pressure slammed into me like a hurricane, making my hands give out. I couldn’t summon any more strength. Not a drop.

I looked up at him-that face I had spent years memorizing. The same face that had looked at me exactly like this five years ago in the snow.

This person-the one I’d once believed was my fated mate-wanted to kill me.

Again.

My hands fell limp at my sides. I dragged up the corner of my mouth in some sad excuse for a smile and asked him, hopeless and broken:

“Damon... why won’t you believe me? Just once. Why?”

For a split second, his grip almost loosened.

Then the coldness slammed back into his eyes, and everything shut down again.

“Five years ago, in that blizzard-you pretended to be Claudia. You let me think you ran into an avalanche for me. You used my family’s resources to help your family get a foothold here.”

He stopped, staring at me.

“If they hadn’t shown me that photo, I’d still be in the dark.”

“So why the hell would I believe a word you say now?”

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Claim

The light in my eyes slowly faded. I wanted to tell him I never pretended to be anyone else, and I never bragged about being his savior.

But I had already said all of that five years ago.

He didn't believe me then.

He held up that burned photo, the one left at the scene with only a quarter of it still intact, and asked me, "Then tell me, why is the person in this photo Claudia and not you? You said it was a picture of you two together. So where's the negative?"

Back then, I lowered my head and stayed silent.

Because... the negative was gone.

I had no way to prove that the damaged photo was of the two of us, just like I had no way right now to prove that Claudia had thrown herself over the railing last night.

"Since you've already decided I pushed her, why do you keep asking?" I stared straight at him. "Whether I admit it or not doesn't matter to you at all, does it?"

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 60

Aria's POV

I felt Damon's grip loosen. Just a little.

He froze for a second, caught off guard. But I could tell he was still convinced I was lying.

Because his eyes were still filled with suspicion, anger... and maybe hate.

His face stayed dark. Cold. Then his phone rang.

He glanced at the screen. "What is it?"

"Alpha, the pack hospital just called. Miss Stone is bleeding out and needs blood now. But there were several bad car accidents last night-the storm wiped out their O-type supply."

Claim

"Ordering more from the central blood bank would take an hour. Miss Stone only has about thirty minutes. The only quick solution is to find O-type blood from someone in the pack."

"We checked. There's only one match."

Damon's jaw tightened. His lips pressed into a hard line. "Who?"

"It's Luna."

Justin's voice crackled through the phone. I felt my blood turn to ice.

I knew exactly what was coming.

I was nothing but an offering. My mate, handing me/over to Claudia-the woman who'd burned my whole life to the ground.

Pathetic. That's what I was.

"Got it."

Damon ended the call. His eyes-God, his eyes-grew even colder. Darker. Deadlier. He turned to me slowly, like he was savoring the moment.

"Your dad..." His voice was calm. Too calm. "Does he still need to continue his medical parole?"

My heart stopped.

Not a question. A threat. It sounded smooth, almost gentle. But underneath? Nothing but sharp edges and the kind of fear that makes your stomach drop.

I knew what he was really saying. Your father's life is in my hands. His treatment. His future. Every breath he takes-I decide if he keeps taking them.

My throat closed up. I couldn't swallow. Couldn't speak. The dungeon felt smaller somehow, the walls pressing in, the air thick and heavy.

He didn't need to shout. He didn't need to threaten me outright. The look in his eyes said everything-

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De what I want. Or your father pays the price.

† wanted to scream. To fight. To tell him he was a monster-that he had no right to use my dad like a

bargaining chip.

But what good would that do?

Clains

He held all the power. All the cards. And was standing there with nothing but a breaking heart and a body that still ached from everything he'd already taken.

"... Of course," I finally whispered. My voice barely existed. "Thank you... for getting the pack alliance's experts for him."

The words tasted like ash.

"Good. Then you can repay the debt now. Save Claudia. You owe her."

I pressed my lips together. Said nothing for a long moment.

What was I even waiting for? What did I expect?

He wasn't going to show me mercy. He wasn't going to call this off. He wasn't going to-
Love me.

I forced a bitter smile. Yeah. I lost. I always lost.

"Okay. I'll go to the hospital with you. I'll use my blood to save her."

My hand drifted to my stomach without thinking. The miscarriage surgery. Just weeks ago.

I sat on the cold chair in the blood draw room, my right fist clenched so tight my nails bit into my palm.

A thick needle-almost the size of a pen-slid into the vein in my arm. I felt it pierce my skin, slip inside, and then the dark red blood poured out, filling the bag little by little. Drop by drop. Like my life was draining

out of me.

I watched as my blood slowly climbed past the measurement lines.

One hundred milliliters... two hundred... four hundred. Two full bags.

Before I could even catch my breath, the nurse rushed them to the operating room.

But soon, she came running back, panting, panicked. "It's not enough! The patient is still bleeding-we can't stop it!"

"But... there's no one else!"

Damon turned to Justin. “How long until the other donors get here?”

“Fifteen minutes.”

The nurse’s voice cracked. ‘Fifteen minutes is too long! Those two bags will only last ten more minutes at

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most. If we don’t get more blood, we might not be able to save her!”

“Keep drawing from me.” I lifted my left arm. Placed it on the table like it wasn’t even mine anymore.

The nurse’s eyes went wide, “Absolutely not! The safe limit for an adult is four hundred milliliters. Any more than that and your body won’t be able to handle it!”

“Will I die?”

“It won’t kill you, but-”

“Won’t kill me?” I cut her off. A hollow laugh almost escaped me. “Then draw.”

Damon.

I looked at him through the blur of exhaustion and bitterness.

I can’t wait.

I can’t wait to have nothing left between us. Nothing owed. Nothing binding. Just... done.

H

Clar

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 61

Damon’s POV

Clant

I watched her face-white as paper-turn almost translucent under the hospital's harsh fluorescent lights.

The nurse said her body couldn't take much more.

"Stop"-the word was already on my tongue.

Then she spoke. Said she wanted to continue. The way she said it-like she was begging the nurse to drain her dry.

This is the same woman. The one who whimpers when I squeeze her too hard. The Graysons' little princess. Spoiled rotten.

Yet there she sat. Not making a single sound. Not once. Her face completely drained-so pale it was barely there.

My throat tightened.

I should stop this.

But on what grounds?

"Other donors are here!"

The words hit me like a reprieve,

I didn't even realize it, but I'd already let out a breath didn't know I was holding.

The nurse yanked the needle out.

Aria pushed herself up from the chair. I stood right behind her and watched her knees buckle.

She was about to fall. Before my brain even caught up, I was already there.

"Thank you, Mr. Hawthorne. But... no need." She pushed me away and staggered forward.

Mr. Hawthorne?

"If there's nothing else," she said, her eyes empty and tired as she looked at me, "I'll head out."

My hand just hung there. Stupid. Reaching for nothing.

"Let me drive you." I heard my own voice-more urgent, more panicked than it had ever been.

Like I was afraid of something slipping right out of my chest.

What are you afraid of? You made it clear, didn't you? Rhein asked. Cold. Disappointed.

I didn't know! She did this to herself, didn't she? She owed Claudia. She owed Liam. A few hundred milliliters of blood was nothing compared to what Claudia lost-she didn't even have her baby anymore because of Aria!

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"No need." Her answer was flat and final.

Clan

Aria turned around, lifted her chin, and looked straight at me. "I helped save Claudia to pay you back for getting the experts for my dad. Now we're even."

The anger was gone from her eyes. All that was left was exhaustion and something that looked a lot like relief.

My heart stopped.

Then I was moving. Grabbed her wrist before I knew it.

A wave of cold washed over me. Her skin felt like ice against my palm.

She'd gotten thinner-the thought slipped in without permission and just stayed there.

Aria's POV

I looked down at his hand on my wrist.

What did he even want now? What else did he expect from me?

"Let go. We're even."

I pulled my hand away without hesitation.

After everything that had just happened, I felt... completely exhausted.

"You want even? Dream on." He grabbed me again before I could turn away. Hard. Like he wanted to break my wrist.

"If you weren't so jealous and didn't push Claudia-"

“I didn’t push her!”

I was so sick of this. Of always being the one who gets blamed.

“I didn’t push her.” I took a breath, trying to stay calm. “She set me up. The wine. The changing room. The phone call... Don’t you think any of this feels off?”

I pulled my hand free and stepped back, just enough to breathe. Kept my voice steady.

“If I pushed her, why did she call you first? So you could hear it?”

“If I wanted to hurt her baby, I could’ve done it anytime. Why wait until your mom’s party-in front of everyone-just to destroy myself?”

“You could have figured it out. But you hate me. And you can’t admit that Claudia would rather kill her own child than lose you. So you blame me instead. Isn’t that right?”

“I’m done, Damon. I’ve had enough.”

Talking so much left me breathless. I stopped for a second, then kept going. “If you want the truth-just

<Chapter 59

find the maid who spilled that wine on me last night. Ask her. You’ll know.”

“One more thing.” I laughed coldly. “Tell your precious girlfriend-we’re done in a year. She can stop bothering me.”

“Six billion?” I looked Damon up and down like he was merchandise. Then I scoffed. “My mate’s an expensive little toy, aren’t you? Too bad she doesn’t have the cash.”

Claim

Right after came a low growl-but it carried something different from Damon’s, a cold authority all its own, one that allowed no defiance.

And yet the Damon in front of me didn’t make a sound.

The growl had come from-

Noah.

There, in the shadows behind Damon, I saw Noah angrier than I had ever seen him. His hands-the same steady hands that held a scalpel-were taut now, veins standing out beneath the skin.

Then the crack of bone against flesh split the air.

A dead silence fell.

Noah stood exactly where he was, not even sparing a glance for the knuckles he'd just split. With a blood-smeared hand he nudged his glasses back up his nose, and behind the lenses, those once-gentle eyes held nothing now but the intent to kill.

"This is what it costs to make Aria cry," Noah said, gazing down at him, his voice dropping low. "...Mr. Hawthorne. I've never had much patience."

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 62

Damon's POV

That punch came out of nowhere-

Claim

I jerked my head hard to the left at the last second. The fist still grazed my cheekbone with brutal force, sending a hot, stinging burn exploding across my face.

The heavy crack of bone against bone echoed sharply down the quiet hospital hallway.

The splatter of blood on the floor froze me in place. I couldn't believe it-one scornful remark from Aria, and my concentration just shattered.

Damon, kill him!

Rhein snarled loud and feral in my head-not from the pain, but from the pure humiliation that burned even

hotter.

Never-not once-had anyone dared to lay a hand on me. And this piece of trash just did.

My fist slammed into his gut. He let out a deep grunt of pain, his entire body doubling over-hit the ground like a sack of meat.

But it wasn't over. I'd make him understand just how stupid it was to challenge an Alpha.

"You're going to regret this."

I wiped the blood from my lip, walked over, and caught him by the scruff of the neck-nails digging in-and hauled him up.

My claws sank into his neck. Blood welled up, hot and dark, dripping down my fingers.

Rhein growled low in my chest. Rough. Hungry. Now. Kill him. Make him pay for wanting what's ours.

My hand tightened. Squeezed. Lifted.

His feet left the ground. His face went purple. His hands clawed at my arm-weak. Useless.

Dying.

Then-her voice.

"Stop it, Damon! Let him go!"

Aria rushed forward and shoved me with everything she had. It didn't matter-she couldn't move me. But my hands... they let go anyway.

As if her will had reached straight through my chest and pried them open.

Then I saw it

down Hand on his arm. Face too close to his.

Leaning in.

A

Like she was trying to protect him.

From me.

From her mate.

Fury ripped through me-every nerve, every cell.

No-something was wrong.

Claim

The man who'd just landed that blow was nothing like the harmless doctor I'd taken him for. The two didn't fit together at all.

Noah lifted his eyes in the shadows, a thread of mockery in them.

Was he really only a Beta?

No. That kind of strength was far beyond any Beta's.

"Aria. Get over here. Now."

"Stop being a tyrant, Damon!" That look-like I was the enemy. Like I was evil itself.
"Neither of us-Noah or me-is your slave or your toy."

She didn't move. Just stayed there. Hands still on him. Refusing to budge an inch.

Daring me. Testing how far I'd go.

Rhein paced inside me-restless, wild, impatient. Why the hell isn't she listening?

My patience was burning away fast.

"Aria. This is your only warning."

She still didn't budge.

Those eyes. Stubborn. Fiery. Staring straight at me. No fear. Just defiance. Quiet strength.

It only made the fire in my chest burn hotter.

"Don't you dare pressure her!" Noah straightened up slowly-I could see the pain still twisting his face- and pulled her behind his back like a shield. His hand gripped her arm tight, holding her there.

Like that would help. Like he could stop me if I really wanted to get to her. The idiot actually thought he was protecting someone from me.

Rhein lunged hard against my ribs, pushing and clawing to get out. Right now. We can't wait any longer. Take our mate back.

drew in a slow breath. "One last chance. Come here. Now."

"Or you know what happens."

She let go of Noah's arm.

Slowly

† saw the surrender in her. She always gave in eventually. I knew it.

Then-a hand shot out Wrapped around her wrist. Pulled her behind him.

Not mine.

Noah. Again.

“Aria, you don’t want to go? Then don’t. I’m here. No one’s going to force you.”

His voice came from beside me. “Damon, Alpha or not, you don’t have the right to treat her like this.”

I turned my head. “The right?”

Clam

I took a step closer. Slow. Let the silence stretch between us. Looked down at him. “What exactly gives you the right to talk to me about rights, Mr. Hargreaves?”

“Her little friend? Or that worthless nobody heir from the Hargreaves family?”

“You really think you can stand in my way?”

“I don’t care what I am. I’m not letting you force her into anything.” His voice was shaking. Veins popping on his forehead. Braced like he actually thought he could stop me.

I laughed-cold, sharp, mocking.

“Then try it. Stand up. Let’s see if you can stop me from taking her.”

I stepped forward, my full Alpha pressure dropping onto his chest like a crushing weight.

Fur bristling. A low growl building in my throat. My fangs slid out. My claws lengthened. I was ready to use them. Grip his neck. Twist. Until something gave. Until his head snapped.

“Stop it, Damon! I’m not going anywhere with you.” Aria looked me dead in the eyes and nearly shouted, her voice cracking with exhaustion and raw emotion. “This ends right here. I’m done.”

She shot me one last hard glare that cut deeper than I wanted to admit, then turned on her heel and started to walk away. Her steps were unsteady but determined.

I lunged forward, reaching for her-to pull her back where she belonged.

Then Noah slammed into me like a buli, locking his arms around mine, holding me back with everything he

had.

“Get the hell off me.” My voice was ice-cold even as heat flooded my veins.

Noah refused to let go, muscles straining. His wolf clashed head-to-head with Rhein-teeth grinding, invisible but vicious.

“Noah Hargreaves, let go!” I clenched my jaw so hard my molars ground against each other, watching Aria’s back getting smaller and smaller as she disappeared down the long, sterile hospital hallway.

Just as I was about to reach my limit and snap Noah’s neck-

Claim

Rhein let out a long, agonizing howl. It tore through me-not from anger this time. For the first time-hurt. Broken. A raw sound of loss I never expected from him.

Panic. Pure panic.

Aria! Our mate!

What’s wrong with her?

I dropped my hands and looked to where she was.

She was walking slower now, head hanging low. Her body started to tilt sideways, legs giving out.

Then a dull, heavy thud.

Justin’s voice rang out at the same time, urgent and concerned: “Alpha, Luna just passed out!”

H

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 63

Damon’s POV

When I reached Claudia’s room, Mom was just stepping out. She looked furious and immediately demanded,

“Damon, I heard from the maids that you brought that bitch here? Where is she?”

My eyes narrowed. “She came to donate blood for Claudia. I already had someone drive her home.”

Claim

“Drive her home?” Mom’s voice turned sharp. “Didn’t Justin tell you what I wanted? You should’ve sent her straight to the police station! Fine, whatever. You’re probably too busy anyway. I’ll go handle it myself. Claudia hasn’t woken up yet-go in and see her.”

I reached out and stopped her. “Mom, let’s wait until Claudia wakes up before we do anything.”

Mom’s eyes went wide. “Wait for what? That bitch hurt Claudia so badly. She needs to be locked up right now and pay for what she did. Damon, don’t you dare go soft on her. Claudia has sacrificed so much for you. You can’t let her down, especially not after...”

“Mom!” I frowned and cut her off, reaching up to gently brush the hair from her forehead. “Go get some rest. I’ll handle everything else.”

Mom let out a long sigh. “No matter what, it doesn’t change the fact that Aria Grayson did this to Claudia. Damon, you can’t just let her off the hook. A woman like that has no place in our Hawthorne family. You need to divorce her immediately!”

Divorce...

The word hit me hard, and a wave of irritation rose/in my chest. For some reason, I felt a strange resistance to the idea.

Mom kept pushing. “Damon, did you even hear what I said?!”

“Just stay out of it,” I said, then opened the door to the room,

Claudia lay quietly in the bed, her face pale and completely drained of color.

I walked over to the bedside and looked down at her. Aria’s words from earlier kept echoing in my head, along with that complicated look in her eyes.

‘You could have figured it out!

‘You keep blaming me only because you hate me and don’t want to admit Claudia lost the baby on her

own.’

Claudia slowly opened her eyes. "Damon..."

"Claudia, how are you feeling?" I stepped closer to the bed.

She shook her head weakly. Then, as if suddenly remembering, her hand instinctively moved to her stomach. "My baby..."

I stayed quiet for a moment before saying, "The baby's gone."

Charms

Claudia froze. After a long pause, she reached up and grabbed my arm tightly, her lips trembling. "That's impossible, Damon. You're just joking with me, right?"

"Claudia..."

"No!" She covered her ears.

I gently pulled her hands down. "Claudia, calm down."

My chest felt heavy. I let go and tried to keep my voice as gentle as possible. "Don't get upset. Just lie back and rest, okay?"

Suddenly she wrapped her arms around my waist and begged in a small voice, "Damon, please don't leave. Stay here with me... just for a little while?"

I almost pulled away from her instinctively.

But when I looked down and saw the tears on her face, something in me softened. I lowered my voice and comforted her, "Alright. I'm not going anywhere."

Claudia buried her face against my chest and started crying quietly. Just then the doctor knocked and came in to check on her, so she reluctantly let go of me.

I stepped out of the room and told Justin, "Find the maid who lured Aria into the changing room that night."

"Yes, Alpha." Justin paused, then asked carefully, "Are you suspecting someone else pushed Miss Stone..."

or..."

"I'm not sure yet. We'll talk after we find her." I looked at him.

"Got it. I'll pull the security footage right now." Justin turned to leave.

But the image flashed in my mind again-the moment the elevator doors closed, Aria collapsing into

Noah's arms.

I called Justin back.

"Alpha? Anything else?"

"... Find out which room she's in."

Justin blinked, then understood. "Luna's room is upstairs, number 1208. Do you... want to go see her?" He swallowed hard, looking nervous.

Right then, Claudia's soft voice called my name from inside the room. I gripped the door handle, pushed it down, and walked back in.

Claudia had somehow gotten out of bed and was standing there barefoot. The second she saw me, she threw herself into my arms and clung to my waist like she was afraid I'd disappear.

"Claudia, you shouldn't be out of bed yet." My body went rigid for a second. I gently pried her hands away.

Lie back down."

Cute

helped her back to the bed and made sure she was settled.

She looked up at me with those sad, helpless eyes and said weakly, "Damon, I'm scared... Every time I close my eyes, all I see is myself falling from the second floor, covered in blood..."

Fresh tears slid down her cheeks again.

I looked at her, but suddenly Aria's beautiful face flashed in my mind. This morning her face had been even paler than Claudia's was now. My heart clenched tight, like something was squeezing it hard.

"Claudia, I'm sorry, I failed to protect you and the baby." My voice came out low and heavy.

"How can you say that? It's my fault. If I hadn't been standing there... if I hadn't said all those things to Aria

maybe...” Claudia whispered, then stopped mid-sentence. She looked up at me with teary eyes.

“If you want anything, just tell me. I’ll do my best to make it up to you,” I said quietly.

The moment she heard that, Claudia sat up quickly and used all her strength to wrap her arms around me again. “Damon, I don’t want any compensation. I just want you...”

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 64

Aria’s POV

I was scrolling through the company work group on my phone when the door to my hospital room suddenly burst open.

I looked up quickly.

Astrid stood in the doorway, breathing hard.

“Astrid...”

She didn’t say a word. She stormed straight over, grabbed my arm, and yanked up my sleeve without asking.

Clans

The spot where they’d drawn blood was covered in a huge, ugly bruise—all purple and blue. Astrid’s fingers tightened on my sleeve. Her face went stone cold in an instant. She turned around like she was about to march right back out.

I knew that look. Astrid was pissed, and I knew exactly who she was going after.

“Astrid, listen to me. I did this on my own,” I said quickly, grabbing her wrist before she could leave. Just to make sure she believed me, I added, “Really, I swear.”

She let me pull her back to the bed, but her eyes were already filling with tears. She looked at me and said, “You silly girl, do you even know what you were doing? If Noah hadn’t called me and said they were about to drain you dry, I wouldn’t have believed it. Are you trying to throw your life away?”

Astrid’s chest rose and fell rapidly. She took two deep breaths, but it didn’t help.

Her voice turned sharp. “Aria, what the hell is going on in that head of yours?!”

“Astrid...” I held onto her, pleading. “Don’t be mad, okay? 1...”

“I swear the person who should be in surgery right now isn’t Claudia Stone-it’s you! Are you out of your mind? If Claudia wants to die, let her die! Are you seriously still that lovesick over Damon? Six hundred milliliters? You really don’t care if you live or die, do you?”

I didn’t dare talk back while she was going off like that. I just sat there quietly and let her yell.

When she finally started to calm down a little, I said in a steady voice, “Astrid, I chose to give blood for Claudia. It wasn’t because I still love Damon. I did it to make us even-that’s all.”

Astrid opened her mouth, then closed it again. She reached out with warm fingertips and gently touched the bruised spot on the inside of my arm. “Does it hurt?”

I flinched involuntarily. “...No, it doesn’t.”

“Look at this bruise, and you’re still acting tough.” Astrid lowered her head and softly rubbed my arm with two fingers.

“Don’t be mad anymore. There won’t be a next time,” I said, patting her shoulder lightly.

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Claim

“Next time?” She gave a bitter laugh. “If there’s a next time, I’m done with you. Then I’m tying up Damon and that bitch Claudia and feeding them both to the rogue wolves.”

I couldn’t help laughing “Deaf. I’ll help you do it.”

Astrid finally smiled too.

“By the way, what really happened with Claudia’s miscarriage?” she asked, eyes wide.

I told her everything.

“Using her baby to frame you... I don’t know if Claudia Stone is stupid or just plain insane!” Astrid looked shocked.

I stayed quiet for a moment, then said, “No, she’s not stupid, and she’s not crazy. Even if it didn’t happen this time, it would’ve happened eventually. She was going to get rid of that baby one way or another.”

Astrid looked confused. “What do you mean? But... why?”

“At first I thought the same as you-it didn’t make sense. But then I really thought about it and finally figured it out. The baby she was carrying... wasn’t Damon’s.”

“What?!” Astrid’s mouth fell open and stayed that way for a moment. “Not Damon’s?!”

“Yeah. If that baby had really been Damon’s, even if the old Alpha didn’t approve, once the kid was born, Damon couldn’t just ignore it. Claudia would’ve become part of the Hawthorne family eventually. She had no reason to throw away a winning hand like that and risk framing me instead... unless...”

“You’re right,” Astrid said, watching as it all clicked into place. “There’s only one reason she would work so hard to get rid of that baby.”

“So do you think Damon knows the baby wasn’t his?” Astrid continued.

“I don’t know,”

Astrid gave a cold snort. “Anyway, Claudia went through all this trouble to set you up. If she didn’t get what she wanted, she’s definitely not going to let it go. There’s no security footage and no witnesses... it’s going to be difficult to prove you’re innocent...”

Witness?

Something clicked in my head. I turned to Astrid and said, “Astrid, I need you to help me find someone.”

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 65

<Chapter 63

Damon’s POV

Claim

After I finished the phone call, I stood by the railing of the long, open-air hallway. Someone walked up and patted my shoulder.

I glanced over and asked quietly, “How is she?”

“She’s awake and doing okay. Astrid’s staying with her.”

Marcus leaned against the railing. “If you’re so worried, why don’t you just go upstairs and see her yourself?”

Right then, Aria’s cold, determined eyes when she said we were even flashed through my mind. My chest tightened with irritation.

“No need,” I said.

Marcus let out a short laugh. “Tim was right-you’re such a walking contradiction. You’re the king of saying one thing and meaning another. No need? If you really didn’t care, why did you specifically ask me to text Astrid and casually fish for information about Aria?”

For the past two years, every time someone mentioned Aria, I got impatient and didn’t even try to hide the disgust in my eyes. So Marcus had always thought I had zero interest in her and was just waiting for Claudia.

But now... maybe even I hadn’t noticed it yet-I was starting to care about Aria more and more.

Marcus rested his elbows on the railing and leaned forward slightly. “So the baby in Claudia’s belly really wasn’t yours?”

I frowned. “When did I ever say it was mine?”

Marcus thought about it and realized it actually made sense. He had nothing to say back.

“Those rumors were going around like crazy for a while, and you never cleared them up. We all just assumed...”

“Rumors? What rumors?”

Marcus raised an eyebrow, pulled out his phone, and showed me the airport pickup photo. “Here. She posted flowers and a special airport welcome on i*****. Who wouldn’t think you two looked perfect together? A few days later, Claudia was photographed at the OB-GYN clinic. With that airport photo fresh in everyone’s mind, it’s no wonder people thought she was carrying your kid.”

I looked down at the picture on his screen.

“I wasn’t there to pick her up.”

“I was at the airport that day to meet the guy in charge of the Silverclaw Group cooperation deal. The flowers were prepared by Justin for the client. Their flight got delayed and rescheduled. I only found out after I got there that Claudia happened to be flying back the same day.”

Marcus froze. “That much of a coincidence?”

I looked up at him. “Do I look like I’m lying?”

“Then... what’s your deal with Claudia?” Marcus asked, clearly confused.

“I owe her my life.”

Claim

Marcus looked like everything suddenly made sense. “So when you agreed to marry Claudia back then, it was to repay her for saving your life?”

I didn’t answer.

For most people, saving someone’s life wouldn’t mean you had to marry them. But for me, it felt normal.

My dad died in a car accident when I was just a baby. Mom had only been married into the Hawthorne family for a little over a year. Losing her husband at the happiest time of her life completely broke her. To escape the pain, she dumped me with Grandpa and left the country alone. She didn’t come back until I was sixteen.

Before that, I might as well have been an orphan.

Even though Grandpa tried his best, he was still running the huge Hawthorne family business. There were plenty of times he just couldn’t be there.

Growing up without real love like that, I naturally became cold and distant when it came to feelings.

So marrying whoever, making whoever my Luna-I honestly didn’t care.

“Have you figured out how you’re going to handle this?” Marcus asked. “What if you can’t find that maid, or if it really was Aria who pushed her? How are you going to make it up to Claudia? Divorce Aria and marry her? Go back to how things were two years ago?”

I stayed quiet for a moment. “I can give her five percent of Hawthorne shares.”

“And if she doesn’t want shares?” Marcus pushed. “What if Claudia just wants to marry you and become

Mrs. Hawthorne?”

“Grandpa gave a strict order-no divorce within the year.”

“Is it really ‘can’t’... or ‘don’t want to?’” Marcus asked, his tone knowing.

I caught the meaning behind his words and turned to look at him.

Marcus straightened up and patted my shoulder again. “Alright, I’m heading out. Still got stuff to handle at the company.”

Night had fallen by the time I walked into Room 1208 on the inpatient floor.

Aria was sleeping soundly. I stepped over to the bed and just stood there quietly, watching her.

She was lying on her side, her pale, smooth legs tangled in the blanket. She had pulled the covers into a ball and was hugging it like a little kid.

A cool breeze came in through the half-open window.

Claim

This woman couldn’t even cover herself properly with a blanket. Wasn’t she worried about catching a cold?

I bent down, noticing how tightly her brows were furrowed. I reached out to gently pull the blanket free

from her arms so I could cover her properly.

Before I even touched her, heard her soft, sleepy murmur.

“It hurts... it really hurts...”

My hand froze. I thought she had woken up, but her eyes were still closed and her breathing stayed even. I let out a breath I didn’t know I was holding.

Then my eyes landed on the big, ugly bruise on her arm.

I took a deep breath, sat down on the edge of the bed, and carefully picked up her arm. I started gently rubbing the bruised spot with my fingers.

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 66

Aria's POV

I woke up just before the doctor came for morning rounds.

Claim

After a good night's sleep, I actually felt a lot better. I completely forgot about the bruise on my arm and tried to push myself up to sit.

A sharp, throbbing pain hit me hard. I sucked in a quick breath.

"Ouch."

Why did it hurt so much worse now? It wasn't this bad yesterday.

I leaned back against the headboard and lifted my arm. The ugly bruise that had been dark and concentrated yesterday looked like someone had smudged it. The color had spread out and faded some.

I stared at my arm, and suddenly last night's dream came flooding back. I had dreamed about being little, getting in trouble for not listening, and Dad getting so mad he smacked my palm with a ruler. In the dream I was crying and rubbing my hand, whimpering that it hurt.

Had I been rubbing my palm in the dream and ended up rubbing the bruise on my arm without realizing it?

The more I thought about it, the stranger it felt, but I couldn't quite put my finger on why.

At eight o'clock sharp, the doctor came for rounds.

My thoughts got interrupted, so I stopped dwelling on it. After the checkup, I went ahead and handled my discharge papers.

I had just finished meeting with Astrid when I got the call from Damon's mom telling me to come back to the Hawthorne mansion immediately.

"The design theme for the Pacific Architecture Competition just came out. I only have two weeks to finish

the draft."

Plus, I had thought everything through these past few days. Since I'd decided we were even, I needed to move out of the house as soon as possible and cut all ties with anything connected to Damon.

"Damon's mom calling you right now can't be good news," Astrid said. "Aria, how about I come with you?"

I put my phone away. "No need. You should get some real rest. Look at those dark circles under your eyes -you've been staying up way too much."

Astrid's eyes suddenly sparkled with a mischievous little smile, "Alright then. You be careful. I'll be waiting for your good news!"

We shared a knowing smile, then I turned and left.

Claim

The moment I walked from the parking lot toward the living room on the second floor of the Hawthorne mansion, I could already hear Claudia and Damon's mom talking.

"Madam Duran, please calm down. Maybe there's some misunderstanding..."

"What misunderstanding? It's written in black and white! How could it be fake!"

Before I could catch exactly what Damon's mom was saying, Claudia's soft, fragile voice drifted over.

"Aria, you're here!"

I gave Claudia a calm, indifferent glance, then looked straight at Damon's mom, who was clearly furious.

Damon's mom glared at me and suddenly hurled a thick file folder right at me. "Sign it."

The folder wasn't sealed, so when she threw it, all the papers scattered everywhere.

The big, bold words "Divorce Agreement" jumped out at me immediately.

I bent down and picked them up. One quick look and I spotted one of the clauses: "Due to the wife's serious moral failings, the marriage can no longer continue."

Moral failings...

How nice of them!

Damon was the one who cheated and broke his vows. I was the one who put up with it and tried to make things work. And somehow, at the end of the day, I'm the one who's in the wrong?

"Does Walter know about this agreement?" I asked, holding the few pages I'd picked up.

"What? You think you can use the old Alpha to pressure me?"

"Madam Duran, please don't get upset," Claudia jumped in before I could answer, sounding all understanding and sweet.

"I'm sure Aria didn't mean it that way. She probably just feels that since Walter arranged the marriage, it's only appropriate to let him know about the divorce. Right, Aria?"

If Claudia had kept her mouth shut, things might've been okay. But the second she spoke up, Damon's mom got even more pissed. She slammed her hand on the table with a loud bang and shouted,

"Let him know? I think she just wants to go tattling! Damon is my son. I couldn't control who he married, but I sure as hell can control who he divorces!"

"I'm telling you right now-even if the old Alpha shows up, you're signing this today whether you like it or not! You heartless, poisonous woman. You couldn't even let an unborn child live. I will never allow a murderer like you to keep living in the Hawthorne family, throwing your weight around!"

Then Damori's mom shot a look at the butler.

The next second, several bodyguards appeared at the living room entrance.

Looked like I wasn't getting out of here today.

"can sign the divorce papers," I said.

Claim

Sure enough, the moment those words left my mouth, I caught a flash of excitement in Claudia's eyes.

She leaned forward, staring hard at the agreement in my hands like she wanted to grab it and sign it for me herself.

I looked at Claudia, then set the papers down. "But I'm not taking the blame for being a murderer."

Damon's mom's face turned stone-cold. "What do you mean by that?"

Right then, the butler walked in and reported, “Madam Duran, one of the maids says she has something to report to you.”

Damon’s mom shot me a sharp look. “What trick are you trying to pull now?”

“Just let her come in,” I said, not answering directly. My eyes flicked over to Claudia. “Then you’ll find out.”

“Madam...”

Before the butler could finish, Damon’s mom cut in coldly, “Let her in.”

E

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 67

Claim

Aria’s POV

“So you’re the one who said you had something to report?” Damon’s mom looked the maid up and down with sharp, suspicious eyes. “Well? What is it?”

“Mrs. Duran, actually... actually, on the night of your birthday party, Miss Stone fell down the stairs by herself...”

“You’re lying!” Claudia clenched her fists and snapped at her.

“I... I’m not.” The maid fumbled nervously and pulled out an envelope, her hands shaking visibly. “This twenty thousand dollars-you gave this to me. You told me to find a way to get Luna up to the dressing room on the second floor, then wait downstairs and make sure no one else came up. Not long after, you got into an argument with Luna, and then... then you...”

The maid lowered her head, glanced quickly between Damon’s mom and Claudia, and didn’t dare

continue.

The butler took the envelope from the maid and handed it to Damon’s mom.

She opened it and saw two thick stacks of cash inside. It really did look like about twenty thousand dollars.

Damon's mom froze. She didn't say a word for a long time.

Claudia's eyes suddenly filled with tears. She defended herself in a shaky voice, "Mrs. Duran, you have to believe me. How could I purposely fall and cause myself to miscarry? If I could, I would trade my life for the baby to be born safely. Besides, I've never even seen this woman before. How could I have given her money..."

Damon's mom looked at the maid with doubt, then turned to Claudia and sighed. "Claudia, don't worry. Of course I believe you!" She took Claudia's hand and patted it comfortingly, then looked back at the maid with a cold expression. "Tell me! Did Aria Grayson give you this twenty thousand? Be honest, and I might still go easy on you!"

As soon as she finished speaking, her sharp eyes landed directly on me.

I let out a cold laugh. I didn't even need to wait for the maid to answer-she had already decided this whole thing was a show I had orchestrated.

Of course, I couldn't deny that I was the one who brought the maid here and told her to say what she knew from that night.

Back when I passed out in the hospital, what Astrid said had given me the idea. If I could see that the maid was the only person who could prove my innocence, then Claudia definitely knew it too. To safely pin the "murderer" label on me, the first thing Claudia would do after waking up was find a way to shut this maid up for good.

So I had Astrid use her connections to find the maid first and hide her.

Astrid later told me that when she found the maid, two other groups of people were already looking for

Claim

her. The maid had been smart and hid early. If I hadn't found her by chance, it might have been too late.

If I guessed right, those two groups were probably sent by Claudia and Damon.

"Mrs. Duran, no... it wasn't Luna. Miss Stone is the one who gave me the money." The maid was shaking. "I swear to God, that's the truth Cross my heart."

Hearing the maid dare to make such a serious oath, Damon's mom's brows suddenly furrowed tightly. For someone who deeply believed in the Moon Goddess, she hated when people swore oaths like that. Once you swore, it had to come true.

Claudia seemed to notice her hesitation right away. She dropped to her knees with a thud and raised her right hand. “Mrs. Duran, I don’t understand why Aria would bribe this maid to slander me like this. I really don’t know how to defend myself, so I can only kneel here and swear to the Moon Goddess too. Please, just believe me...”

“Claudia, you silly child. I already said I believe you, so of course I do!” Damon’s mom quickly reached out to stop her from kneeling.

“Then would Miss Stone like to explain why her signature is on this withdrawal receipt?”

I slowly raised the bank receipt in my hand.

Both Claudia and Damon’s mom turned to look at my hand at almost the same time.

Claudia suddenly found strength from somewhere. She jumped up from her half-kneeling position and rushed toward me, trying to snatch the paper.

Luckily I was ready. I stepped sideways to dodge her grab and held the receipt up higher.

Damon’s mom snatched the receipt from my hand and studied it carefully. She muttered under her breath, “Could it be... the maid wasn’t lying?”

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 68

Claim

Aria’s POV

Claudia looked panicked and whipped around to face Damon’s mom, shaking her head desperately. “Mrs. Duran, you have to believe me. I didn’t do it. That’s not my signature. Someone must have forged it. Yes, that has to be it...”

I let out a cold laugh.

Claudia’s eyes widened as she stared at me. “What... what are you laughing at?!”

“I’m laughing because you’re so pathetic,” I shot back without hesitation.

“You-!”

“Claudia, you’re saying someone else forged that signature, right?”

Claudia's hands clenched into fists so tight her knuckles turned white. She said through gritted teeth, "I don't know where that signature came from!"

"Well, if that's the case, then this is actually pretty easy to prove," I said with a smile.

"What do you mean..."

"When you withdraw cash at the counter, there's always security footage of the account holder signing. Forging someone's signature to steal money isn't exactly petty theft. It's only been a few days since that twenty thousand was withdrawn, so the bank should still have the footage. We can easily find out who was bold enough to impersonate you and sign for the money." I took two steps closer to Claudia, staring her down. "Claudia, how about you come with me to the bank right now and we'll check it together?"

"I... I feel dizzy. I'm not feeling well. I can't go!" Claudia's face went deathly pale, and she instinctively stepped back.

"Oh, really?" I paused deliberately, then suddenly grabbed her wrist before she could pull away.

scared

My eyes narrowed. "Or is it because you're guilty and too scared to go?"

Fear and panic flooded Claudia's eyes. She yanked her hand free and ran straight to Damon's mom, grabbing her arm like a lifeline.

"Mrs. Duran, it's not like that. I..."

Before she could finish, Damon's mom quietly pulled her hand back.

Claudia stared at her empty hands, looking stunned. "You... you don't believe me anymore?"

"Claudia, tell me the truth. Did you give the money to the maid? And the baby..." Damon's mom looked conflicted. Her earlier certainty that I was framing Claudia was clearly crumbling.

Claudia immediately dropped to her knees, tears streaming down her face, and slapped herself hard

twice.

"Claudia, what are you doing!" Damon's mom said in alarm.

<Chapter 66

Claim

“Mrs. Duran, I was wrong. I know I was wrong. I...I don’t even know what came over me. I could see how much Damon hated this marriage, so I thought I could help him-give him a push. That’s why I gave the money to the maid and had her bring Aria over. But I really just wanted to talk to her. I never meant to frame her. I didn’t expect to fall down the stairs either. I swear it wasn’t on purpose. I was just trying to help Damon... I love him so much...

Damon’s mom quickly helped Claudia up. “Claudia, you just got out of the hospital. You can’t be kneeling like this. Get up!”

“Please don’t be mad at me, okay?” Claudia turned to me with teary eyes. “I’m sorry, Aria.”

“Claudia, you did all this for Damon. You don’t need to apologize to this bitch!” Damon’s mom cut her off sharply. She shot me a cold glare, then softened her voice as she comforted Claudia. “You’re such a kind and understanding girl. If she hadn’t pushed you to your breaking point, you never would’ve done something like this.”

“Mrs. Duran...”

“Don’t worry. Right now, the most important thing is for you to rest.” Damon’s mom took her hand and turned to the servants. “You two, take Miss Stone upstairs and take good care of her.”

The servants responded immediately. Claudia obediently followed them out.

Before she left, she glanced at me for just a second, and I caught a flash of triumph in her eyes.

The moment Claudia was gone, Damon’s mom’s expression turned ice-cold.

“Aria Grayson, don’t think I don’t know what you’re doing. All this drama was just to buy yourself time. Well, forget it! Even if Claudia didn’t mean to frame you, it’s still your fault!”

“Hold her down! She’s signing those papers,”

As soon as she gave the order, the bodyguards rushed forward.

I didn’t even have a chance to dodge before they grabbed me and forced me down. My knees hit the floor hard, and I lost my balance, ending up half-kneeling.

“Let me go,” I said, biting back the pain in my knees as I lifted my head to look straight at Damon’s mom.

She let out a scornful laugh. “Let you go? So you can pull another stunt to stall for time? I’d drop that idea right now if I were you. Sign the divorce papers like a good girl. Otherwise-

“I won’t sign unless you let me go.”

“Looks like you’re determined to test my patience today!”

Damon’s mom raised her voice and ordered, “Butler, sign it for her, then throw her out of here!”

The butler immediately stepped forward and grabbed my hand.

Instead of fighting back, I actually went along with his movement.

Just as the pen in my hand was about to touch the divorce papers, Damon’s mom stared at me and suddenly shouted:

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Aria’s POV

Damon’s mom snatched the divorce papers from my hands and flipped through them over and over, searching for anything suspicious.

The butler looked confused. “Madam Duran, is there a problem?”

Chaim

“Aria Grayson, what kind of trick are you trying to pull now!” She gripped the papers tightly and snapped at

I didn’t answer right away. I just glanced at the bodyguards who were still gripping my arms. If they wanted me to talk, they’d have to let me go first.

She forced down her anger. “Let her go.”

My knees were still killing me from that sudden drop earlier. When the bodyguards finally released me, I didn’t stand up right away. It took me a moment to push myself up, then I slowly walked over to the side table by the sofa.

“Aria Grayson!”

She had completely run out of patience and was about to yell at me again. Before she could, I quickly reached behind the decoration on the side table and pulled out a small voice recorder. The little red light was still blinking.

“This recorder was placed here right after I arrived. It caught everything-how you forced me to sign the divorce papers.” I looked straight into her eyes. “You went to law school, right? Then you know you can’t force someone into a divorce. It’s not legally binding.”

“Aria!” she hissed through gritted teeth.

She clearly never expected me to dare place a recorder right under her nose.

I kept talking, calm and measured. “So as long as I have this recording, no matter how many times you force me to sign, if I don’t agree to it, this divorce paper is just worthless trash.”

Her face twisted with rage, and she raised her hand like she was about to slap me.

I dodged to the side. She was shaking with fury. “Someone get her out of here! I don’t want to see this bitch anymore. Now!”

The bodyguards moved forward again.

“Stop!” Damon’s sharp voice suddenly cut through the room.

“Aria Grayson, what are you causing trouble for now!”

I couldn’t help letting out a bitter laugh. As a husband, his first reaction wasn’t to ask why the bodyguards were manhandling me-it was to assume I was the one making trouble without even asking what happened

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Damon’s mom clutched her chest and took several deep breaths. The moment she saw Damon, she pointed straight at me. “Damon! Divorce this woman!”

“Mom, I already told you...”

Claim

“I don’t want to hear it!” she cut him off. “Damon Hawthorne, I’m telling you, you must divorce this bitch today! It’s either her or me! If you don’t agree, J... I...”

She grabbed the glass of water from the coffee table and smashed it hard on the floor. Then she picked up a sharp piece and pressed it against her wrist “Then I’ll just die right here! Since no one listens to me anyway!”

Damon moved fast. He snatched the shard from her hand and said sternly, “Mom, whether I divorce or not is my business. You should know that threatening me with suicide won’t work.”

“Fine!” She staggered back a couple of steps and threw the medical report at his face.

Damon caught it and read it carefully. “Confirmed pregnancy of six weeks, consent to terminate the pregnancy.” He read it aloud.

The whole living room suddenly felt like all the air had been sucked out.

“Did you see it clearly?” Damon’s mom raised her voice. Then she pointed at me. “This woman has only ever wanted to use the Hawthorne family. She secretly got rid of your child and made sure she could never get pregnant again! She’s a heartless murderer. If we keep her around, am I supposed to just watch you have no heirs and let the Hawthorne legacy be destroyed?”

It took Damon several seconds before he finally spoke./

“Where did this report come from?”

“Don’t you get it yet? It doesn’t matter where the report came from. What matters is this bitch!”

Damon gave me a cold look.

“Where else would it come from? The hospital sent it, of course! If it hadn’t been delivered here, I wouldn’t have known how long she planned to hide it from us!” Damon’s mom said angrily. She paused, wanting to say more. “Damon...”

But he cut her off coldly and ordered the butler, “My mother is tired. Take her back to her room to rest. No one is allowed to set foot in here without my permission.”

Under the butler and servants’ half-pushing, half-pulling, Damon’s mom left the living room very reluctantly.

Now it was just me and him left in the room.

“Aria, tell me what this is.” He held up the report and walked toward me.

“You saw it clearly, didn’t you? It’s my medical report.” I answered calmly and turned my head away, avoiding his eyes.

“Now you can’t even be bothered to explain?” His voice suddenly got louder.

“Aria Grayson, how dare you!” His eyes widened as he waved the report in front of my face, squeezing it so

hard the paper crinkled. “Tell me why!”

Somments

Claim

Unbonding the Ruthless Alpha

Chapter 70

Aria’s POV

Clarry

Damon’s Alpha pressure slammed into me like a crushing wave. It was so heavy, so suffocating, I could barely breathe. My legs turned to jelly, and my body instinctively wanted to curl forward. But I refused to let him see me break. I forced my spine straight, lifted my chin, and met his eyes-those dark, stormy, dangerous eyes that used to make my heart race for all the wrong reasons.

A cold, bitter feeling kept rising in my chest, wave after wave.

Why?

Because when I was lying on that cold operating table, terrified and desperate, calling out for help, you were too busy with your precious girlfriend. You hung up on me without a second thought. You left me there alone.

Damon, it was you-you who killed that baby. So what right do you have to stand here and ask me why?!

I swallowed hard, pushing down the ache that burned in my throat. Then I let out a cold, mocking laugh and answered him.

“There’s no reason. But if you really need one... then it’s simple. I didn’t want the baby anymore.”

Before I could even finish the sentence, his hand shot out like lightning and clamped around my throat. His fingers dug in hard. His voice came out low and furious, shaking with rage.

“You’re fucking asking to die!”

Beg him! Hurry and beg! Lydia’s voice screamed inside my head, full of panic. I could almost feel her claws scratching desperately at the ground. We’re getting choked to death! Aria, please!

My hands grabbed at his fingers, pulling with every bit of strength I had left, trying to loosen his grip even a little. I stared right at his furious face-the clenched jaw, the burning eyes, the veins bulging on his forehead, And for the first time in what felt like forever, I felt... nothing. No fear. No pain. No sadness

Just a cold, sharp wave of satisfaction washing over me. Sweet, icy revenge.

Damon must have noticed that I wasn’t reacting the way he wanted, because his anger only grew. He slammed me hard against the wall. The back of my head hit with a dull thud.

Lydia’s voice sounded even more frantic now, echoing wildly in my mind. He’s really, really mad. Please,

Aria...

Don’t... don’t be sad, I told her silently while still fighting against his iron grip on my neck. We should actually be happy right now. He’s not angry about the baby. He’s angry because we’re finally getting away from him... away from his control. We’re free, Lydia. Can’t you feel it?

My breathing was getting shallower and harder with every second. No matter how hard I pulled at his fingers, they wouldn’t budge. Black spots started dancing in front of my eyes. So I clenched my teeth, gathered what little strength I had left, lifted my knee, and kicked him as hard as I could right between the legs.

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He Jet go instantly and jerked back with a sharp hiss.

Claim

+ doubled over, coughing violently, finally able to suck air back into my burning lungs. My body stumbled

backward a few unsteady steps before I managed to catch my balance. I bent over, one hand clutching my chest, still trying to catch my breath.

“Mr. Hawthorne,” I said, my voice hoarse but steady, “what are you so mad about? I just solved your biggest problem for you. You should be happy, right?”

I slowly straightened up, making sure my voice stayed calm and clear so every single word would sink deep into his ears.

“Do you remember what you said? If I ever got pregnant, you’d personally drag me to the operating table yourself?”

“And you also said anyone in the world could have your child... except me. I don’t deserve it, right?”

I took one slow, deep breath and forced the tremble out of my voice.

“So,

“I will never bear your child. Not in this lifetime.”

His face turned even darker, like a storm cloud ready to burst. “Aria Grayson, my patience has limits. You’d better think hard about the consequences before you open your mouth again. Pulling the same trick over and over only makes people sick of you.”

“I have never been more certain of anything in my life, Damon.” I held his gaze. “I know we can’t divorce yet. But we can sever the mate bond now-and live completely apart.”

Damon roared at me, his fury shaking the room. “You killed my pup, and you have the nerve to talk about leaving me?! Don’t you dare! Noah. Astrid. Your career-Aria, I’ll use every last one of them to grind you down until you bow your head!”

I let out a helpless laugh. Every ounce of strength had drained out of me. “Threaten me all you like. But I, Aria, swear it by the Moon Goddess-bond or no bond, I will not live under the same roof as you. Not even if the world is ending.”

He glared at me as if he wanted to burn a hole straight through me, his eyes blazing. “Good! That’s just perfect!”

“Aria Grayson, you’d better not regret this!”

Damon wrenched the door open, “Get out! You’ll have your wish, Aria-go! Even at the end of the world, I won’t spare you a single glance!”

I walked past him, and for once, none of the old ache stirred in my chest. There was only numbness.

“Congratulations,” I said softly. “Now you can bring the woman you love home whenever you please.”

I turned, gathered my things quickly, and left without looking back.

Behind me came the crash of the side table going over, and the sharp shatter of glass scattering across the floor.