

## Bad Love 131

### Chapter 131

Why is he leaving?

I'm breathing heavily and felt so good only seconds ago and now I'm hit with a wave of shame and insecurity.

I wash my hands and body quickly and turn off the water.

I dry off with the plush towels and wrap one around my hair and another around my body. If there was a way to magically leave this hotel and whisk myself miles and miles away, I would. In a heartbeat.

But I'm trapped and I'm not going to run or cower.

I'm entitled to pleasure. Same as anybody else.

I don't know why Aaron would react like this, but I'm not going to let him ruin something so beautiful.

I lift my chin and walk out into the main suite.

He's sitting on the bed. His head in his hands.

This is ...not what I was expecting to see.

"Aaron?"

"Get dressed, Leah. Our reservation is in thirty minutes."

Like I want to go anywhere with him after this shit.

His chest heaves.

"Yeah. About that," I say. "I think I'm going to pass."

He looks up and his eyes are completely feral. His wolf isn't just at the surface, its moments from breaking through.

"Put some clothes on," he growls.

I instinctively take a step back.

"My control's hanging by a thread right now, Leah. As a man, I want to f\*\*k you senseless. As my wolf...he wants to mark you and to hell with the consequences."

I gasp.

I'm not a wolf.

Aaron can not mate me. Not without risking his own wolf's well-being.

This is madness.

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M...

Aaron breathes deep. "I can still f\*\*king scent you, Leah. And I can't handle it right now."

I take a step back, then another.

And another.

Then I run out of the room and slam the door behind me.

He roars and my heart stops. I lock myself in another room and wait.

Wondering if he's going to come after me...

## Chapter 132

He doesn't give chase.

I'm not sure if I'm relieved or disappointed.

After the initial shock and fear passed, the reality of his words sank in...and it was HOT.

I've never been wanted like this before.

Never had any man-let alone an Alpha like-Aaron-desire me to the point of madness.

It's heady and a seduction all its own.

It makes me want to strip down in front of him, touch myself and dare him to take me. Any way he wants to.

But I deny that urge.

It's only passion talking. And I need to listen to my mind. Not my heart or body.

Our relationship is too tenuous and what he is proposing...I'm not sure why or what it might mean. And I'm already a pariah in the paranormal world as a human Alpha. I can only imagine the fallout that would transpire if I was mated to Aaron.

That would not bode well for him.

I'd be too much of a liability.

Once mated, the lives of wolves are intertwined. The souls bound together.

And since I'm dying... such an act would be a death sentence to him.

He can't die. He needs to live. He needs to take care of our baby.

I caress my stomach as I stare at the lavish gowns and lingerie spread out in this bedroom.

I need to tell him. Tonight.

The undergarments are silk and the pricetags are ridiculous. These are scraps of clothing, really, not much material at all. I can't fathom how they can charge so much for nothing. I debate not wearing any-that would surprise him-but the allure of such decadent panties and bras is not something I want to pass up. I settle on a black matching set that has trailing chains of Swarovski gems and tie knots at the hips. Maybe he'll actually untie these instead of ripping them off my body. The bra is my size, or normally would be, but as my pregnancy progresses, my breasts are larger and they bulge over the demi cups. I catch a glimpse of myself in the mirror. My curves are more pronounced, my hips and breasts are fuller than they were just a week ago. My body is changing and I like it. I like seeing the physical evidence that life is growing inside of me. I pick a dress. This time, I go with white. It's floor-length with a plunging neckline and a slit up one thigh that shows off almost my whole leg when I walk in it. There are heels too. My, but he thought of everything. I don't know much about designers but I recognize the red bottoms of Louboutin heels, and I slide those on my feet. Aaron has rigid control. His emotions reined in so I'm never really sure what he's thinking or feeling. He made it clear today that he wants me. And I'm going to test just how badly. With what little time I have left, I won't deny myself or him. I can't mate him-but I can claim his body. He's in for a surprise tonight...one he won't forget. There's a knock on the door. "Leah?" I unlock the door and open it. Aaron's eyes flash pure gold, then he reaches for me...

## Chapter 133

### AARON

Leah looks like a goddamn sacrificial offering.

And it's a miracle we made it out of that suite without me dragging her to the nearest horizontal surface.

She has no makeup on, at least not that I can tell. But her lips are painted bright red.

It keeps me staring at her mouth and thinking about all the things I want to do to it.

The white dress is long and almost demure. Until she moves or leans to the side, then I get a glimpse of all that toned, tan thigh. And don't even get me started on the top half. Did she always look this?

My memories of Leah are vivid and I've known her body for years, but lately everything seems heightened. It's like

we've been together in color and all of a sudden everything's high def.

Her body is sexier, that's for sure.

Or maybe that's just my obsession with her.

It's something I need to hide better.

Because as an Alpha of my stature I can't afford this kind of weakness.

My wife should be a possession. A means to an end.

The physical embodiment of the peace between our packs.

But instead I find myself wanting her, longing for her when we aren't in bed tangling up the sheets, thinking about

her when there are a thousand other priorities I need to address.

When the limousine pulls to the curb, I step out first and then I extend my hand to help her out.

Her fingers are so small and smooth compared to mine. Next to me, she looks petite and breakable. Yet she can match my passions.

That scene from the shower...

Holy sh it, it's ingrained in my brain.

Every whisper of her fingers over her flesh. Each throaty little moan. The way her nipples tightened up just because she was staring at me.

I'm hard again.

Damn it.

I adjust myself and guide her into the restaurant.

"You're really taking this first date thing seriously," she mutters.

I should've from the start. I know that

now.

TA

But I didn't appreciate her then.

She was just a tool.

V

"It's this way," I tell her. I tip the maitre de a couple hundred and he leads us to a private part of the restaurant.

He opens a large, dark paneled door.

This is a separate, hidden club within Gallery. It's Michelin-starred and every bit as luxurious. But this area is for guests requiring more...discretion.

There is a senator at one table surrounded by two women who are definitely not his sixty-year-old wife.

Another table has a Hollywood star and his entourage.

Next are a pair of professional football players.

Several mid-level gangsters occupy a long table against the left wall.

"It's just this way, sir," our maitre de says.

"Thank you, Antoine," I tell him.

We keep moving past a private wine cache and toward a second room. It's screened off and Antoine sweeps aside a heavy curtain.

What the he II?

I stop suddenly and Leah slams into my back.

Chapter 134

"Liam?" Leah glances at me and I usher her to the side. "We'll take a table back in the main room," I tell Antoine.

I spin Leah around and get her on the other side of the curtain.

"What is my brother doing here?"

"Dining," I reply easily. "What else?"

We're led back to a private alcove and I pull out my phone and text for my security detail to come in.

"A team will be joining us, Antoine. Please position them appropriately."

"Of course, sir. Right away, sir."

We sit and take the menus he extends to us.

A bevy of waiters and bussers pour drinks and place a platter of artisan breads on the table. Leah reads her menu and I'm glad that she isn't too put off by the fact that her brother is in the same exclusive restaurant.

I wouldn't think much of it either.

Except I know who he is eating with. And it's not Tobin. Or some other Council member.

Their backs were to us, but I recognized the tattoos on their necks. These are Old Country Wolves. One from an Arctic pack that traces its line to the origins of our kind. Two from a Eurasian pack that's anchored in Belarus.

The closest equivalent to these merciless wolves is the mafia.

They aren't beholden to the Council. They operate outside of it. They don't give a sh it about humans and would be delighted if humanity fell off a cliff.

They're weapons dealers.

Drug traffickers.

Their back alley dealings influence entire regions and the economics of whole countries.

What-the-actual-f\*\*k is Liam doing, taking a meeting with them?

I can't write this off as coincidence or pretend that he just runs in some shady circles. This is too high up. You can't even get a sitdown with Michail or Ryker unless you're brokering a transaction of several hundred million. They don't fo ol around with any of the small stuff. And the third wolf, Dorian, I don't think he's left Gibraltar for twenty years or more.

What brings him to this state, now?

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I've crossed paths with these Alphas a time or two.

Michail's pack is a bu nch of hotheads. I taught one of Michails' goons a lesson not too long ago.

I'm pretty sure his limb never regenerated.

And Ryker, he's a known assassin.

Leah continues to peruse the menu, completely oblivious to the fact that her brother is enjoying a meal with some of the deadliest wolves on this planet.

I order a 2018 Chateau Petrus Bordeaux.

When I see James and two of my men take up position directly outside our little room, I breathe a bit easier. I can hold my own, no problem.

But Leah is vulnerable.

And when she became Alpha of Pack  
Roberts it sent shockwaves through the entire paranormal community.  
I don't think most wolves would think  
twice about killing her. The power she holds is a hell of a temptation.  
Even for me.  
She looks up and smiles. "This is really  
nice, Aaron."  
Right. We're on a date.  
I don't care about the food or the wine  
or the exclusivity of this restaurant. I just want to get her back to that room,  
unwrap her like it's Christmas morning  
and feel her body beneath me.  
"I'm not sure what to order," she  
whispers.  
"You don't have to decide. It's a tasting menu. They're going to bring everything."  
Her eyes go wide. "Oh. Wow. Okay. Glad I brought my appetite."  
Typically the servings aren't so large, and there will be wine pairings and  
palate cleansing aperitifs in between.  
"Do your men want to join us," she  
whispers. But of course they can hear. "Maybe James is hungry."  
I watch James' head tilt.  
"When we're ready to leave, they can  
take our table and have a full meal too."  
One of my men pumps his fist in the air.  
Leah laughs.  
Antoine returns and decants the wine.  
He pours some for her. "Oh no, you taste,  
Aaron."  
Funny. She looks almost panicked about  
it.  
It's not a big deal. It's either good or tastes corked. She shouldn't worry about  
the pretense.  
I sip and savor the flavor. "It's good," I  
say.  
Antoine looks to Leah to take a sip. But  
she just smiles demurely.  
She was never a big drinker, but she does like a good red wine. She must not  
be in the mood tonight.  
When we're alone again I reach across  
the table and take her hand.  
I'm not sure why I was so determined to take her out. But sitting here with her, this feels right.  
"You're not wearing the necklace."  
Her hand goes to her throat. "I took it off

before the shower..."

I pull the chain and pendant out of my pocket with my free hand.

## Chapter 135

LEAH

My hands shake as I pull the pendant back on. It hangs between my breasts and draws attention to my cleavage, which I suppose is good, although I didn't expect Aaron to get so annoyed about me forgetting to wear it.

This is all new to me.

My stomach is a bit knotted and I reach for some bread.

It. Is. Delicious.

If this is just the carb course, I'm pretty sure the rest of this meal is going to be orgasmic. I blush. Well, no. Nothing is going to compare to that.

"What are you thinking about?" Aaron asks.

I blush harder.

He chuckles.

I'm going to miss this. Seeing him laugh-it is so rare. Feeling him stir my body to life. Just being beside him. It's easy to forget that I'm dying as I focus on the day-to-day dealings of my role as Alpha and working to save Pack Roberts.

But when I'm with Aaron...

I want to savor. I want every second to extend into infinity. I want these good feelings to last. Knowing they won't, that's just another reminder of the ticking clock that has become my life.

"What happened?" he whispers.

I blink back the tears that are blurring my vision.

"I'm just happy," I tell him. And I am.

I'm only sad because I'll miss him.

The first round of food comes and I'm spared from having to say more.

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Time passes slowly. We eat and talk. Aaron shares stories of his own childhood-details I've never heard before or even thought to ask.

We talk about good times, before the war resurged and ripped our lives apart.

Before the main courses, I notice a commotion in the hall outside our room.

I can't say I'm surprised when Liam



barrels toward the wolves positioned at the door. James stops him with a hand to Liam's chest. "Not one step more," James warns.

"Back off, Beta."

"No."

"That's my sister," he growls as if daring Aaron's men to stop him.

"Let him through," Aaron says.

But he's not alone.

Aaron bristles as two other wolves follow behind Liam.

The first is a darkly bearded man with eyes

that are almost translucent. The stark contrast between his light eyes and dark skin and hair is unnerving. The second man is blond and makes me think of Vikings or warriors from the Steppe. He's really tall and wide with brown eyes that take in every detail.

Both are heavily tattooed and they look, I don't know, for lack of a better word, dangerous.

"Hello Alpha," the Viking-looking wolf says.

"Michail." Aaron nods.

The man scoffs. "I was addressing her."

Aaron bristles.

There are undercurrents of tension here and Aaron might outwardly appear calm, but his one hand has curled into a fist and the other lingers close to the steak knife beside his dish.

"Leah, this is Michail, and the other Alpha is Ryker." Liam handles the introductions.

They make my skin crawl so I can't really say 'it's nice to meet you. I settle for a lame, "Hello."

Aaron angles his body to see past them. "I don't see Dorian. Has he departed already?"

The guy with the dark beard smiles a little creepily. "You know Dorian," he says.

"Always up to something."

To the two wolves Liam says, "Alright, you've met my sister. Let's head out." My brother comes and drops a kiss on my forehead and says to me, "Enjoy your evening, Leah. Save room for dessert. The Zabaglione is delicious."

I watch them leave. The wolf called Michail lingers. His gaze traces over me in a way that has Aaron growling. "See you soon," he tells Aaron. And that's not some pleasant farewell, it sounds ominous. When they're gone, I ask Aaron, "Should we be concerned?" Between Tobin and now seeing my brother with these two wolves I can't shake the feeling that he is in over his head. "Your brother has shi tty taste in friends," Aaron tells me. My brother very convincingly let the world think my Pack was mismanaged and a bu nch of reprobates while he and my father launched a secret division of Roberts Corp for multi-billion dollar military contracts. I won't make any assumptions. And when I see my brother tonight or tomorrow, I'll ask him about it. "I'm sure there is a reason for it, Aaron. "Yes. And that's what concerns me...

## Chapter 136

Dinner is lovely. The food is incredible-of course it is-but what's more is the way Aaron looks at me. Like I'm his only focus in the world. His attention is like that when we are alone in bed, but outside of it, moments like this are rare. And though we've talked about work and pack elements and any number of mundane things over the years, we seldom had times like this. Tonight is one that I will cherish. "Do you want me to have them pack up the wine?" he asks. "No thanks." He holds his hand out to me. "Shall we go?" He threads his fingers through mine and guides us away from the table. He pauses only to pull a black AmEx card from his wallet. "Be back by 2am," he tells James. "Sure dad," James teases about the curfew. He takes the card and goes to converse with Antoine, whose team is already bussing and resetting our table. The two other wolves escort us out of the restaurant. On the car ride back to the hotel, he drives. I'm in the front seat, and I cross my left leg so the whole length of it is revealed to him. His gaze darts between my thigh and the focusing on the cars ahead of us. The fact that I can entice this man and distract him while he's driving sparks my own passion. "Eyes on the road, Aaron." "If you wanted that, you should've picked a different dress." Then he puts his hand on my knee. His touch is warm and sets a spark that spreads through my whole

body.

He doesn't have to ask me to spread my legs, it's like they have no will when it comes to him, it seems.

He glides his hand a bit higher. Then retreats down again. And so begins a slow, thorough seduction. He inches a little closer with each pass but this massage is light and definitely not touching where I need.

He brings his hand maddeningly close and withdraws again. On the next pass, he spans his hand across my hip and catches the edge of my panties. When he starts to draw them down, I lift my hips.

Yes. Please yes.

He rubs them in his hand. "You're very wet, Leah."

I gulp. "I am."

"Have you been thinking about this all night?"

I have.

He tucks the panties in his pocket. "You're building quite the collection," I say.

He smirks.

Then he reaches across the seat and draws my left leg up and onto his side of the SUV. With his eyes still on the road, he touches me.

I gasp.

My legs are spread wide and his fingers waste no time, dipping in. Out. In. Again and again.

I'm drenched.

I hum with pleasure.

He reaches deeper so his fingers curve to rub that incredible spot inside, and his palm presses against my clit so it creates friction with every movement.

Aaron builds me up only to stop.

He draws his hand away and I'm breathless,

"Do you want to draw down the top of your dress?" he asks.

Yes. Please.

I don't even hesitate. I peel the sleeves down and my breasts strain to be free.

"Take it off," he whispers.

I unclip the bra, slide it off and toss it in the backseat.

His hand molds to my breasts and the tug at my nipples sends delicious little tendrils of sensation through me.

He's still driving, eyes on the road.

I'm draped across the passenger seat. One leg in his lap. My dress hiked to my hips and dropped to my waist.

Naked for any passersby to see.

He drives along easily. One hand on the wheel, the other touching me intimately.

The windows are tinted-at least I assume they are-and probably bulletproof too.

There are people out and about, traffic all around us.

"I'm going to make you come a few times," he tells me. "Then you're going to slide that ass across this seat and f\*\*k me. I expect you to do exactly what I say. Is that going to be a problem, honey?"

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A shaky breath escapes me.

"No. Not a problem."

I don't often admit it, but I like this dominant side of him.

Aaron lives up to his promise.

He touches me until I'm screaming his name. My blood has barely cooled before he winds me up again.

And again.

And again.

I'm so languid that by the time he whips the car onto a side street and slides into park,

I can barely sit up.

But when he unzips his pants and I see the way his body responds to mine, it brings me back to life like nothing else.

In a few deft moves he has my seatbelt undone and me lifted over until I'm straddling his lap.

He's so turned on, when I grip him, it feels like silk over steel, and I whimper with excitement as I impale myself.

He curses.

I moan.

And then there is only the steady rhythm of his body thrusting up and mine slamming down. His hands tug both my nipples into his mouth for a swirl of his tongue. When he teases the tips with his teeth, I come undone.

But Aaron... he hasn't even begun.

I lost track of the number of times we made love that night. Twice in the car, and then back in the hotel, I don't recall. I'd sleep only to be awakened by his mouth or hands.

It has never been this intense.

His desire to possess me is almost savage.

And yet... I feel worshiped.

As dawn pours into the room, I finally start to drift. My head rests on his chest, counting his heartbeats.

His body is warm and hard beneath mine, one hand caressing my hair and neck.

"Come back home with me," he says.

2

NO

I can't. I have to see things through for my Pack. "Not yet."

"Soon?"

I kiss his chest, right over his heart. Because this powerful Alpha isn't controlling my will or forcing me to concede. He's respecting me enough to make my own decisions.

"Yes."

I want to spend time with him. Like this.

A time will come when I'll be sick. Too sick for moments like this, but in my heart, I know Aaron will take care of me. I can see us just as we are now, lying together, and I pray that this is how I spend my last moments.

He kisses the top of my head.

I need to tell him about the baby. I want to tell him.

"Aaron, there's something I need to tell you."

My phone starts buzzing.

X V

He reaches to grab it from the nightstand. "Dennis?"

"He's one of the engineers."

I swipe to take the call. "We've had a breakthrough, Alpha," he tells me. "Can you come back to the office?"

"I'll be right there."

"Have James drive you," Aaron says.

I can take an uber but it's not worth the argument. "All-right"

I push out of his arms, or at least I try to, he drags me back for another kiss. His dark eyes are so deep as they search mine. What does he see? I wonder.

"Tell me you love me, Leah..."

## Chapter 138

Is that what he wants?

I smile. "I've loved you for a long time," I tell him.

A month ago, I never would've admitted such a thing. But now, his pride. Mine. What does it matter? Life is about love.

And love is everything.

He grins. "That's good."

He doesn't give me back the words. I'm not sure he can. Aaron has been broken down in ways that make my traumas seem tame.

That's another part of life, I'm learning. Accepting people as they are.

And I accept him.

If this is all he can be. It'll be enough for me.

I drag myself away on shaky legs.

I'm sore in certain places, but even that is kind of a turn-on, because it's the things we did that make me overly sensitive. And it's these residual feelings that will remind me of him in the long hours to come until I see him again.

"I'll pick you up for dinner tonight."

My heart quickens at the thought of another night in his arms. Another 'date.' I nod.

"Okay."

"Eight o'clock. Don't be late."

I slide back into my dress and grab my purse. I don't bother with shoes.

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I'll do my walk of shame and take the elevator down a few floors.

In the whole scheme of things, what does it matter?

Funny, how dying is giving me all new perspectives on how to live. I hang onto those and use them to keep the sadness at bay.

Crying won't change things.

Although deep down, I wish there was another way...

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The hours crawl by.

manage a quick shower and change clothes. When I leave my hotel room, James is waiting outside for me.

He offers a smile and then walks by my side to the elevator, out of the hotel. He pauses only to settle me in the backseat of the SUV.

When we reach Pack Roberts building, he walks me all the way up to the conference room.

He took the whole door-to-door service very seriously.

"I have meetings with some of my packmates."

"We're your packmates," he reminds me. "But okay. You can head up. I'll hang out down here in the lobby."

I get the impression that he'll be my shadow for the foreseeable future.

"How did you get stuck with babysitting duty?" I ask.

He looks offended. "I volunteered, Leah. It's an honor."

Damn it, it that didn't make me almost weep.

"Hey, do me a favor, keep this on you at all times that I'm not around or when you're not with Aaron."

I take the package he extends to me. It's not big. It looks like a giant pen. Only about an inch around.

"What is this?"

"Kind of like an EpiPen."

I frown. "But I don't have any allergies."

"It's not for you. And it doesn't contain epinephrine."

I hold

up the tube-shaped object. It's red at one end.

"It's wolfsbane, Leah. Not enough to kill, but definitely enough to incapacitate. Someone comes at you, you slam that red side down-anywhere you can hit them."

It's injectable poison. I nod and slide it into my back pocket. "Okay."

FO

I just pray I'll never need it.

In the restricted computer lab, Liam is at a bank of monitors talking quietly with Dennis. "This round of beta testing shows promise," he says to me. "We've run several thousand simulations and the model of learning with the statistical results of the tests is overwhelmingly positive."

Dennis explains to me, "A statistical error of up to 5% is considered acceptable."

If lives are at stake, I'm not sure any mistake is 'acceptable.'

"Human error is as high as 15%."

Oh. I guess that is better then, comparatively.

"So what happens now?" I ask them.

"We run several more tests and begin scaling up the software. We will need to employ a separate organization to test the efficacy of our firewalls."

Liam nods. "Our offense is only effective if it can't be hacked."

Yes. That was one of the elements that terrified me. This is AI. It can evolve and still be 'command-able' but what happened if that tech was taken over by an enemy?

"There is a self-destruct mechanism that will initiate if tampered with," Dennis says.

But I'm sure there is a way around that too.

"We're getting close, Leah," my brother says. His eyes are bright and shining.

Though everything about this fills me with foreboding, I smile at my brother. "I'm so happy for you, Liam. And for you, Dennis. This is a big advancement for the team."

Dennis bows slightly and moves off.

I incline my head for Liam to walk with me.

We move to a quiet corner of this secure floor. I lean against a desk. Liam takes a seat opposite me.

"What's on your mind?" he asks.

"The wolves from last night. Who are they?"

"Business associates."

"They seem shady."

He snorts. "Says the woman who's with Aaron Rathborn."

I don't like the implication here. I've never known Aaron to associate with Old World wolves or anyone that seemed violent. Well, that's not entirely true, but I don't like the way

those males looked at me last night, and I'm not dumb. It was because of them that we ate dinner with an entire security detail.

I venture a guess.

"How much money do you owe them?"

"It's not like that," Liam sputters.

"If it is, you can tell me."

He jumps off the desk but he's still not meeting my eyes.

"Seriously, Liam. We are in this together. If you need money, I can swing it. Aaron will--"

"Enough!" Liam's eyes flash with his wolf. "Can you quit bringing him up for five minutes!? We don't need him, Leah. We have to stop being beholden to him."

I cross my arms.

"He has his hooks so deep in you, you don't even see it. Do you?!"

"See what?"

## Chapter 139

"How he's using you. Aaron hates everything about Pack Roberts, Leah. And that includes you..."

I suck in a breath.

His words are like physical blows.

"Look," he says. "I get it. You're young. You think you're in love. But what do you know about love? This is f\*\*kin' Stockholm Syndrome-like 101 from a Psychology Textbook. You've built an obsession with your captor because you've been with him for so long.

It's not real."

I fight the urge to cry.

I will not let Liam see how his words affect me.

"You're pretty," Liam goes on. "And he's a male. But he'll stick his dick in anything, sister. You're not special. Not to a monster like him. You're an object. A possession."

I'm gutted by his words.

Liam takes my hands. "I'm your brother. And love you. Dad loved you. It kills me. It makes me sick thinking of all things you've had to endure for us. It's unforgivable."

He kisses

my hands.

"I'm going to make it up to you. I promise. Once this Defense contract goes through, you won't have to go back to him. The paperwork has already been signed getting us back equal shares. With the money from the DoD, we'll have enough to start buying out his corporate holdings and we will level this playing

field. I swear it.”

I think I’m going to be sick.

What Liam’s said.

What he’s proposing...

“You’re going to bring us back to war,” I tell him.

“No. I’m going to crush him and ensure your safety and the safety of Pack Roberts for the next century.”

He pulls me to him in a hug. “I shouldn’t have let Dad pledge you.”

Is it guilt that is making him want to compensate now? “I’m okay, Liam.” I’m better than okay. And I have a baby. One who will bridge the peace between our packs.

I take my brother’s hand and put it on my stomach. “Liam... You don’t have to avenge me or risk yourself or seek to crush anyone.”

“What do you mean?”

“We can have the peace we’ve been longing for. And we don’t have to fight it. I’m pregnant. I’m having Aaron’s baby.”

## Chapter 140

Liam looks murderous. His brows furrow and his canines actually drop.

Then he shakes his head and seems to rein his wolf back in.

He steps back and smiles at me. “You’re right. This does change things.” He shakes his head again, like he can’t believe it. “I’ve lived so long with war and this idea of having to conquer Pack Rathborn... it’s hard to consider that there can really be peace.”

“I know what you mean. I suspect this will take a lot of getting used to.”

“Wow. Uh, Leah, this is great news. Congratulations!”

He hugs me.

When he draws back, his eyes mist. “You’re having a baby!”

He hugs me again.

This is the reaction I’d hoped for-the acceptance and love.

The hope.

Because that is our only way forward. If we can’t believe in a better future, there is no way we’ll ever be able to obtain one.

“You’re going to be an uncle!”

He laughs but it sounds more like a choke. “I can’t believe it.”

“It took me a minute too.”

“Leah... what I said before...it wasn’t to hurt you. You are my only family in this world and I love you. You deserve to be treated better. You deserve only goodness.”

A lump rises in my throat.

You’re too kind. You’re my Alpha. I’ll fight for you to my last breath.”

My heart swells.

He means it.

His words may have been coarse, but his heart is in the right place. And, “It’s okay, Liam. I’d always prefer to hear the truth.” I might not like how he said it, but “I appreciate that you told me.”

He nods solemnly. Then his gaze dips to my stomach.

“Do



you need anything? When was the last time you ate? Can I get you some orange juice? That's what pregnant women need, right? Folic acid or something..."

"I'm good-"

"I'll go get some." He starts out of the room.

"Liam, wait! I'm fine."

He

pauses and glances back at me. "You're our future, Leah." He lowers his voice. "Your child is the future of our pack. I won't be long," he promises.

I'm pretty sure there is OJ downstairs in the cafe.

So I just sit down when he rushes out of this computer lab.

I feel pummeled.

Liam didn't pull his punches at all, and while I'd always want someone to be honest with me, I'm not sure I can forget some of the more hurtful things he said.

Is Aaron only using me? Am I so discardable?

What's worse... what if Liam's right? What if I have been deluding myself all along about this?