

Bad Love 141

Chapter 141

I sit in the computer lab for another hour.

I find myself wanting to call Aaron to confront him. I should get those answers before tell him about the baby.

I dig out my phone and dial him.

He dumps me into voicemail. "In a meeting."

Then a few seconds later: "U safe???"

"Fine." I text back.

"K. Talk soon."

I stare at my phone and think back on the last years. All the times I'd been overlooked and taken for granted. Made to feel jealous and ignored until it suited him.

There's some truth to what Liam said.

Things might be good now, but they weren't always.

And the only time things really changed was when I obtained some power of my own. Is Aaron only holding on now because I can finally be independent?

And if that's the case, then how can I continue to love someone who can never really love me?

Liam said he was going out for orange juice, but that shouldn't have taken but a few minutes. Even if the cafe is out, he could Doordash or there is a convenience store maybe two blocks up the street.

I call him.

But it goes to voicemail.

Huh.

t'd be nice if one of these males

Take my call.

My phone rings and I answer it. "What'd you go to pick the oranges?" It's like a lame dad joke. Only Liam doesn't laugh.

"What oranges, Leah? What are you talking about?"

It's Aaron.

"I'm on my way to the hotel, but I wanted you to know I'm in Montana. I'm flying back, so it'll be a few hours before I arrive."

So much for dinner.

r maybe we do roo

"Want to push the reservations back?" he asks. service instead?"

Room service means we'd be eating in bed- if we stopped to eat at all.

hath bed

"You know, I'm actually not that hungry."

"Oh. Okay."

He's quiet for a moment.

Everything that Liam said has been playing like a bad song

can't block out the doubts. Much as I want to, I can't.

repeat in

my head. I

Because deep down, I know there is a thread of truth to each of them.

"You okay, honey?" he asks.

The note of concern and the endearment just make me doubt myself eyes. "Yeah. I'm good. Tired." more. I rub

my

"Let James bring you back. Get some rest."

I have an overwhelming urge to cry.

There is so much we need to say.

And yet, much as it often does, it goes unsaid.

"I have to go," he tells me.

"Sure. 'Kay. Bye."

I hang up.

Then I stare at my phone feeling lifeless.

"We're thinking about closing up early tonight," Dennis tells me as he approaches the area where I'm sitting. "Well, relatively speaking."

"It's Friday. Go for it."

"We'll be back at it tomorrow morning."

"I know. But let's let the team sleep in a little bit. No one in the office before 10am."

He smiles wide. "Thanks boss."

"Don't mention it." They're running on empty and if they don't get some solid sleep, someone is going to drop the ball or make a mistake.

He turns to go.

"Hey, have you seen Liam?" I ask him. "Or heard from him maybe?"

Dennis shakes his head. "Not in the last hour or so."

It seems weird that he'd leave and not answer my calls.

"Is everything all right?" Dennis watches me carefully.

"Of course." I clear my expression. "Head out while you can. You're burning minutes."

He saures and moves to snare ine news wirninis Team. Iney grin and high-tive and clear the room in less than thirty seconds.

I resume my seat and close my eyes.

I try to work through the doubts and fears. I try to center myself with positivity because if nothing else, that is better for my baby.

I think I even doze off for a while.

When I open my eyes, I see that it's half past ten.

I turn off lights and take a lap gathering up empty coffee cups and junkfood wrappers. I drop them in the trash bin and move the energy drinks to recycling.

My phone beeps and I mumble a curse. It's the message alert, meaning I've missed calls. Da mn it, I didn't even hear it ring. I type in my passcode and see four missed calls from an unknown number.

One of them sent several video texts.

I click on the first one and then fumble the phone as the image comes into view.

It's my brother.

He's beaten and bl oody. Chained to a chair.

Someone is holding him hostage.

My first instinct is to call Aaron,

It's dumb.

He's essentially my enemy and he doesn't really like my brother, but the urge is there. He would help, I think, but I know he's on a plane right now so it's pointless to try.

Wolves don't involve humans in our affairs, so it's not like I can dial 911 or call the police.

I could call my own pack, but they're two states over. I shove out of the computer lab and lock up then race into the elevator to the ground floor.

My phone rings while I'm descending. "Hello?"

"Have you received my messages?" The voice is deep. It contains an accent I can't place!"

"Put my brother on the phone."

The man chuckles. "You are in no position to make demands."

"You want something from me or you wouldn't be calling."

He chuckles again. "Look at you, Alpha," he sneers the word, "flexing your authority."

"Put my brother on the phone. Let me know he is okay. And then we can talk about whatever it is that you want."

I need to know Liam is alive. That photo could be from a few hours ago and who's to say what has befallen my brother

since.

I step out of the elevator.

James is in the lobby. He takes one look at me and rushes over.

I shush him to silence with a motion of my hand. "Come on,"

I say calmly. "It's an easy enough request. Let me hear my brother's voice and then I can meet whatever demands you want to make."

"You want to know if Liam is alive, come see for yourself. You have thirty minutes."

My phone dings. It's an address.

The phone disconnects before I can say anything else. I try dialing the number back-it's not like they blocked it or called from some restricted number-but no one answers and there is no voicemail.

It just rings and rings and rings.

My hand is shaking when I lower the phone from my ear.

"They have Liam," I tell James.

"I gathered." He takes my arm and ushers me out of the building. He talks into his watch about Bravo Team and Delta Teams, and I surmise he isn't the only one running security nearby.

"I have to go to him."

He stops abruptly and it jerks my arm. "Go straight into the trap?"

I'm not dumb. "I know it is. But he's the only family I have left."

James curses. "Aaron's phone is going to voicemail. He's still airborne."

"When does he land?"

"Forty minutes."

The caller only gave me thirty. My brother doesn't have that long.

I run out of the building and to James' SUV. He covers my back,

a 9mm drawn while I get in on the passenger side. When he rounds the vehicle and gets behind the wheel, he starts the

"

ignition but doesn't switch it into drive.

"Leah. Stop for a second."

"James, put the car in drive. Now. We need to go."

"No."

I sense that he's waiting for reinforcements, and they're going to what? Sit and corner me to keep me safe while each second might mean the last for my brother? He hits the lock button.

"Either start driving or let me the f**k out of this car."

He frowns. "There's no way in hell I'm letting you run into the hands of someone who obviously means your pack harm."

“Who said anything about letting me?”

Then that fancy syringe, the one with wolfsbane that James so kindly gave me...I slide it out of my purse and jab it into his

arm.

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“Da mn it, Leah!” James’ features contort with pain. He lets out some sound that is almost a whimper before his body starts convulsing uncontrollably.

If he’d been driving, we’d be off the road and wrapped around a tree.

I get out of the car and go to the driver’s side.

I open the back door and climb in. Then I sling my hands beneath James’ arms. He’s shivering like a baby.

I’m overcome with guilt. “I’m sorry,” I whisper. I know he was only being a hardass to protect me. Deep down, I’ve come to think this wolf is actually fond of me. “I’m sorry.”

Then I tug with everything I have and try to pull him into the backseat.

James is massive. Not quite as tall as Aaron, but just as thick and he weighs three times as much as me.

I grunt and groan and heave harder, but it’s like trying to move a mountain. When I finally drag him into the back, I climb over him into the front, push the seat forward so I can reach the pedals, and tear out of the parking lot. I jab the

map feature on my phone as I go.

“D-don’t,” James says. “They’ll...kill you.”

He’s starting to shift. His body bows unnaturally, a result of the wolfsbane I injected into his bloodstream, but he doesn’t fully

crossover.

“James...I’m already dying.” I stop because he roars. An instant later his eyes are blue again and his face looks normal, albeit sweating profusely. “Nod if you can understand me.”

His skin is morphing with fur along his arms and then it recedes, like his body is stuck between both forms. I know he’s

tough and he said this wouldn’t kill a wolf, but I’m worried. He jerks his head though.

“If something happens to me, you call Adam. He’ll know what to do.” I turn left and accelerate as the road opens up. “Okay?”

He nods.

I follow the prompts as my phone calls them out and the directions take me to a rundown section of town near the docks. There are cargo containers and huge warehouses.

Barbed wire fences cordon off the area. The streets are dark and the smell of stale water is strong. I don't have to guess at which building or at how I'll get in.

The gate is open.

The lights are on.

"Lee-ah...don't."

It's James. He's trying to push himself up but he lacks the strength. His hands shake and his whole body is wracked with tremors. Despite the pain he's experiencing, he's still trying to help me, to protect me.

It's a random thought but I say it, "You'll make a good dad someday."

Chapter 144

AARON

I'm missing a date with my wife tonight, and I'm pissed about

I never should've gone back to the Council today.

I swear it was like some bullshit power play to get me to come to heel just because they called. They're like that, the Elders, always wanting to make sure other wolves knew their place and how to obey.

I've never had a problem with them before. I'm not like Tobin with his blind obedience and idealism. But I'm not a conspiracy theorist, either. The Council serves its purpose. I don't have to like its members or even its decrees. But the Council has kept our species alive and thriving for millennia.

I wonder at their mandate for Leah to transition.

There's likely merit to it.

I've shown my hand with her and her frailty as a human is something that could be used against me. Solidifying her position as Alpha assures that others won't think that they can so easily attack Pack Roberts. And that threat could come

from anywhere... even her own packmates.

I rub my chest. My wolf is angry and clawing at my insides to be free.

I check my phone again but the thing's worthless. I try to get the wifi to switch on but the pilot said it was down and no matter how many times they tried to restart the router, it's not working.

“We’re beginning our descent,” the pilot tells me.

Great. Fine.

It won’t be long then.

We’ll be wheels down. I’ll meet up with Leah. All will be well.

At least, that’s what I’m telling myself. But from the moment she left this morning and especially after that call we had this

afternoon, I can’t shake this pervasive and relentless tension. It’s like a low hum of unease that skitters over my skin.

My wolf wants out. Now.

He’s growling and clawing at my insides.

I rub my chest. “Easy boy. We’re almost there.”

He makes a mournful sound that does nothing to ease my dread.

I’m not sure this terrible sense of foreboding is going to abate.

Not until I hold Leah again...

I reach into the glove compartment and there’s a gun. I grab

I sense that it won’t make a difference, but something about the weight and feel of that cold metal in my hand brings some comfort.

I exit the vehicle and start toward the docks. The soft sound of waves echoes to me. I only have a few minutes, maybe five or six and I wonder what the hell I’m going to do if Liam isn’t here. If this was all just some elaborate scheme and once they have me, both Liam and I will be executed, leaving Pack Roberts to some other wolf to claim it.

I cross the threshold and the heavy metal door makes a loud creak. The light outside helps me see within, but the warehouse itself is dark. At the far corner, is another single light on.

The hell with this.

This feels like a movie where someone is going to turn on their phone or a flashlight-because the only source of light in that

dark space isn’t going to make them an obvious target or something. Even in police procedurals where they’re leading with their flashlight and their gun...still...so... obvious.

I’m not doing that. I fumble along the wall beside the door and when I feel several switches, I flip them.

Huge dome lights overhead wink on, brightening the whole space.

It's empty.

No. no. no.

The phone in my hand rings. "Hello?"

"Making your presence known. Lovely. Come in and close the door then. Let's not keep your brother waiting."

The caller doesn't say anything else, but that's okay. He hasn't hung up yet.

I jog the length of this huge room and then slow my steps at the end.

Stepping through the door, it's unlike anything I expected...

Chapter 145

The room is spacious and clean. Quite opulent. It's like the designer transported the insides of an Italian villa-complete with marble and finely upholstered furniture, glass chandeliers and even a cozy, roaring fireplace-into this dockside commercial building.

The stark comparison to the vacant warehouse behind me has me doing a double take.

"That's our shipping and receiving area," he says easily. "This room is for receiving our special guests."

That sounds creepy and ominous. "Ryker."

I recognize him immediately as the wolf from the restaurant.

His features are too remarkable to forget.

He sniffs a bit at the gun in my hand, like it's some accessory that he finds offensive.

Whatevs.

"My brother?"

"He can join us shortly." He holds out his hand. "Come. Sit."

There are no other wolves in this room, but I can't kick the feeling that there are other wolves watching us nonetheless.

He opens a black leather ledger and draws out printed papers. At a glance, I see my name on them and Roberts Corp. headings. "What are you proposing to do with these legal documents?" I ask.

He smirks. The man's eyes pin me and his features bear

unnatural beauty. I think he'd use his looks, this monster.

Beneath his perfect, polished facade, I sense that this male is truly merciless.

"Sign them."

The stack has to be at least a hundred pages long.

"Don't bother trying to read them, I'll save you the time."

A lump is rising in my throat. I can't let my brother die. I just can't. Not after losing dad. But if this destroys the company, Pack Roberts will have nothing left...

"I'd like to have my attorney review them."

He laughs, throwing his head back like I said the funniest thing. A few seconds later, his expression is deathly serious again. "No."

"What do they say?" I ask carefully.

"That you're turning over everything."

The signature page has been placed on top. I flip through the pages trying to skim, but really I'm just looking to buy time. My options are very limited. I can shoot this wolf. But if he

survives, he's tearing my throat out. And what about Liam?

"As I said on the call, I need to see my brother first. Release him. I'll give you whatever you want then."

I mean that. We can rebuild. Raise money. Start over. But there

is no replacing a loved one once they're stolen from us. Death

is final.

I want to believe we will meet again, but I'm not so certain.

And I won't abandon Liam. He deserves better than that.

I set my gun on the table so it points at him.

Ryker tsks.

He moves slowly and places his hand on the table to reveal his phone. The timer is ticking down.

Thirteen.

Twelve.

Eleven.

Ten.

"Do decide soon," he advises. "You sign on time, or we kill

him..."

Chapter 146

"I have to know he's alive."

"You have my word," he tells me.

Oddly. I believe him.

This wolf is many things...

Cold. Cruel. A Killer.

But he isn't a liar.

I get the impression that he'd consider that beneath him. Or more aptly, he's too arrogant for that sort of machination.

Five.

Four.

He smiles.

I grab the pen.

It's a mistake, I know. But I'll be able to fight it. Those papers will take weeks to file and we can revoke them beforehand.

I scribble my name and then jump back from the table. "Bring him out. Now." I level the gun at Ryker. "And so help me god, I'm going to do to you whatever you've done to him."

He smiles again, only this one actually looks genuine. "Such a waste," he mumbles.

Then he rises from the desk and walks to a different table.

There is an old-fashioned phone with a coiled cord. He picks up the receiver and punches in the numbers. "Bring him up," he tells someone, then gently sits the phone back in its cradle.

I glance behind me at the door I came through. No wolves crowd or block that route of escape. But despite that, I still

fear we'll have a hard time to break free of this place. My mind is racing. We can petition the Council. What's happened here...it isn't legal. It won't stand. There are attorneys in the human world and laws that protect against exactly this type of extortion. We have evidence of the hostage situation and can pursue this in legal channels.

It'll be okay. First step is to get Liam to safety.

Then we can figure out the rest.

Ryker watches me, his eyes glittering. "I think I can see into your mind. All the little thoughts spinning like a waterwheel."

My phone is in my back pocket and I'm still holding the gun. Ryker doesn't look concerned at all. He crosses his arms and

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leans against the antique Louis XIV table. Everything in this room feels old and big and decadent.

"My husband is going to make you pay for this."

His face gives the tiniest flinch. It's come and gone in a second. "There is nothing that Aaron Rathborn can do to address this situation. It's rooted in hate generations in the making."

I don't like the sound of this at all.

Right now, I just wish Aaron was here.

I heft the gun a little higher.

"I see why he favors you," Ryker says quietly.

I don't know what he means. Or even who he is talking about.

There's motion behind us and though I keep my sights trained on Ryker, I watch as Liam clears the warehouse entry door. He walks unrestrained straight toward me.

I let my attention flicker for the briefest moment but it's all I need.

Liam is unharmed.

His hair is styled back. His beard is trim. He's wearing a suit and looking like he came fresh from the tailor's.

Where are the bruises and blood, the evidence of beatings and abuse?

"Thank God you're alright," I whisper.

He smiles at me. "Thanks to you, sweet sister."

Then he turns to Ryker. "Is it done?"

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Ryker nods but his gaze stays on me. "She signed over everything."

"Well, then," Liam says as he approaches me, "I don't see any

reason to drag this out. Do you?"

Chapter 147

"Liam?"

I'm staring at a stranger.

"I'll make it quick, Leah. You're the victim in all of this."

My hand waivers. It's like I know.

I know in my heart.

But my mind refuses to accept what my eyes are seeing.

Liam shakes Ryker's hand. "Your percentage will be routed to your account by morning."

"What is this?" I whisper. "One big setup?"

He rolls his eyes. "Obviously."

"But why?"

Ryker gathers the papers and his expression is sympathetic. "If it is any consolation," Ryker tells me, and his accent has thickened. "Your willingness to set aside everything for family... that is the rarest form of loyalty."

"Goodnight, Ryker," Liam says pointedly.

I tighten my grip. "You won't be able to access the firewalls or the lab. I've changed all the passcodes."

Ryker and Liam share a glance.

"Nice try" he says. "But we have a building full of engineers.

Even if they can't hack it, I can find someone who will."

2

Ryker glances at me oddly, his chin giving the slightest nod

before he turns his back on us and walks away.

I am paralyzed.

I prepared myself for many outcomes. But this was not among them.

Liam stalks me and I swing the gun until it is aimed at my brother. "Don't take a step closer."

His eyes flash gold. "Or what? There's not enough bullets in that clip to kill me and we both know that."

"They're silver."

I don't know if they are, but I'm going with it.

He smirks. "Guess we'll see if you can't get off enough shots then." His eyes flare once more. He'll be on me in seconds.

"Stop!"

He freezes but this isn't a stalemate. It's more like a standoff.

He's waiting only to see who will react first.

I have to keep him talking. I have to try and reason with him.

"Liam...you're my brother. You don't have to do this. I named

you my successor. I sealed it in blood. I left you everything. You'll be Alpha. You'll have the corporation- I'm just trying to get it back on its feet. Brother, I'm dying..."

He tsks. And then gestures at my stomach. "And what of that vile bastard growing inside you. Did you think I'd raise his pup!?"

I gasp.

"Did you really think I'd let some mongrel bastard usurp the bloodline of the Roberts that has been strong and pure for

centuries!"

I shake my head, hardly believing what I'm hearing.

We're alone in some lavish room. I'm holding a gun and my hand is shaking. Liam is berating me like he's trying to talk himself up or convince himself of how wretched I am. Or maybe that's how he needs to see me in order to justify what

he's doing.

"You don't have to do this, Liam."

"It's not your fault, I know that," he says without really hearing

"You were just an ignorant kid. But you're a grown woman now. And you should've aborted that abomination yourself."

I'm flayed by his words. I can't even reply because I am cut too deeply to know what to say.

Liam curses. "It's like my own family can't even recognize the responsibility of putting Pack Roberts first!"

"I've only ever put Pack first," I say quietly.

"No, that's not true. And all that crying home to dad... you weakened him too."

I feel like I've been punched. "I never meant for dad to commit suicide."

His slow smile is cruel. "Who said he killed himself?"

Chapter 148

I don't move. I don't think I breathe.

My body and mind detach in some way because I'm too much in shock to process what Liam's saying.

"I killed dad," he tells me, plain as day.

"No. Nooo."

"He was going to bargain with that bastard you married for your sake and his. Instead of standing strong and fighting. I had it all figured out. I had a loan lined up to float us until the military contract was completed. The company was fine! If he'd just waited.... If he'd just trusted me..."

"Liam," I swallow past the lump in my throat.

There's roaring in the distance. The thunder of many men and beasts.

"I'll keep my promise, Leah. And make it quick."

It's the only warning I receive.

Liam lunges, maw wide and teeth sharpening. I fire off rounds. There are fifteen in this mag, and the kick jerks up my arm with each shot.

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Liam ducks and slams into me. His teeth catch my throat, close to my shoulder, but high enough to graze my neck.

He mauls me. Then steps back. He pulls the handkerchief from the pocket of his suit jacket and wipes his face. My blood is splattered on his chin. A splash of it stains his pristine shirt and suit jacket. "Just breathe and relax. Don't fight it."

I close my eyes because I don't want my last images on this earth to be of him.

Aaron.

He's in my heart and in my mind.

His strength and will keep me calm even as the panic boils up and my body grows cold. It's a bit of a surprise how quickly

that chill sets in.

I sink to my knees.

My hands are at my throat, instinctively trying to stop the bleeding. But my hands are wet, and slipping beneath the

blood.

I'm so sad. And scared.

My body shakes with shock and with the knowledge that I'm

dying. Every detail around me comes into crystalline detail as the world slows to each breath. The hard marble beneath my legs. The scent of woodsmoke from the fireplace. My brother's glowing eyes as he watches me suffer. I close my eyes again.

I think of Aaron. My head on his chest. His arms around me.

Instead of feeling the pulse of my blood as I bleed out, I imagine it's the pulse of his heart beneath my head.

I think of summer nights and lazy mornings. Dancing in his arms and every time he fought for me.

I'm going to miss him. So much.

There's a vicious roar. Then another.

Something scorching hot hits my neck and my eyes fly open.

James!?

He's got a poker from the fireplace against my throat, cauterizing the wound. It burns so badly and the stench of burning skin and hair has me gagging.

He looks like hell.

My neck is still burning when he slaps his hand over it. A breath hisses from his lips. "Stay with me!"

But my eyes flicker. When I open them again. I smile.

Oh.

There he is.

Aaron came. I don't know how he knew to come and I'm sure it's some simple detail like my phone or James, or calling his security team, but my thoughts wonder and trickle like water in a steam. I hope I will get to hold him one last time. To feel his big, strong arms around me.

I never told him he'd be a father.

Tears leak from my eyes. I've wronged him.

I've failed Aaron-and my baby.

I reach for James but he's yelling and screaming.

Aaron is grappling with Liam.

They shouldn't fight. Aaron will kill him.

I'm not sorry about that. Just sad really.

Everything tonight feels so ...unnecessary.

The actions rooted in hate and fear and greed.

"Call Adam," I plead with James.

I'm cold, really cold and I wrap my arms around my stomach wanting to keep my child warm. Safe. Things I should've done instead of coming here tonight.

It was the wrong choice as an Alpha.

As a mother.

As a wife.

I've let down everyone who relied on me. I hate myself for it.

And the peace that I sacrificed my life for all those years ago? It will die along with me and my pack will descend into in-fighting, if Aaron doesn't kill them all for this offense.

"We're losing her!" James yells.

It's okay. "Adam can save... baby."

James' eyes flare. "Alpha!"

Chapter 149

AARON

Death is near.

Liam swipes at my side and I punch him in the temple. The sound sends him reeling and the satisfying crack as my fist fractures the bone is music to my ears. I keep swinging, punching and jabbing, with every bit of my Alpha strength

behind each blow.

My wolf wants out.

And he would make quick work of this traitor. But I won't let it end so quickly.

I want Liam to suffer.

To bleed and ache and to feel every blow because death is too easy a punishment for what he has done here tonight.

“Aaron!!!”

It’s James.

He’s on the floor across the room. I see a tangle of hair.

James is holding Leah’s neck. She’s not moving. There’s blood everywhere. Two of my men surround her. One holds her legs down and the other applies pressure to her wound.

“It’s done,” Liam taunts me. “Blood drips from his face. Bruises swell his eye shut and his jaw is a bright shade of blue. His muscles morph as his body starts to shift. I let him. Then when he lunges for me, I catch his jaw and drive it up. I let my left hand shift. I eviscerate Liam in three quick slices and then leave him to catch his own entrails. He’s gasping and sputtering, trying to heal as a wolf and shift back to a man.

But that’s not happening. Leah fired off at least four rounds into him. Between those shots and the damage I’ve done...

“To me!” I yell.

My guards leave Leah and finish what I started with Liam. They can tear him limb from limb or feast on his flesh for all I

care.

I stagger across the room and drop to my knees. “Honey?”

Her eyes flicker up to mine. They’re glassy with tears that leak free. “I’m sorry.”

“You have nothing to be sorry for.”

“Never told you... baby.”

My heart stops in my chest and then double times’ resumes beating. “My hand goes to her stomach. I wanted a family. A little girl with her smile. A boy with her eyes. A kid that would grow up to be as strong and true as she is to me.

I have so many regrets where this woman is concerned. And as I hold her, counting each breath as it leaves her body, each beat of her heart that I hear and feel slowing... I know our

time is limited.

My wife-my life-is dying.

“I love you, Leah! I love you, goddamn it, don’t you leave me!”

Her smile is weak. But it’s there. Her mouth opens but too

softly. I drag her against my chest and hold her.

James is on his cell. "EMTS are two minutes out!"

"Forgive me, Leah," I tell her.

She kisses my chest, right over my heart and I know that when she goes, when she passes from this life into...wherever... she'll be tearing my heart right out of me.

"I should've married you properly."

"Naw," she whispers. That little smile there again. "Wouldn't trade... a thing."

She's being strong and positive.

For me.

My beautiful. Strong. Selfless. Wife.

She isn't crying or railing at the unfairness of it all. She isn't blaming me or hating me that we're trapped in this inescapable war, and it begins and ends with me.

She's saying my name. Softly.

Lovingly.

I feel the influx of power begin. Her Alpha strength would have gone to Liam, but he's dead and as the connection flows from her to me since I challenged and defeated him, I know that her time is drawing to an end.

As I grow stronger, she grows weaker. Her body shudders.

"I wanted a baby, Leah. I wanted us to be a family."

I've f**ked up so many things.

"Next...time..."

I'm hit with a huge jolt of power.

Then in one breath she's with me and the next... she isn't.

Chapter 150

"Get the f**k out of the way!" it's James.

He's on the phone. I hear Adam screaming through it.

James begins CPR, but it won't matter.

She's gone.

My wolf howls and my soul splinters. There's no other description for it.

"Make her breathe, Aaron," James orders me.

What? She's gone. I hate that I know it. But the influx of energy is so great. Like the pull of the moon on the ocean, only straight into me.

"Keep her blood circulating and oxygenated. Adam thinks they can keep her in an induced coma long enough for the baby to develop."

"What!?"

I'm in shock. I know that. I'm still feeding off Alpha powers that are barraging my body. I'm holding my wife's soft hand and feeling it grow colder.

I'm thinking of everything that I had... that is lost.

Everything I wanted that will never be.

James yells, "Breathe!"

And when I make no move to give her air, he shoves me out of the way and covers Leah's lips with his own.

I'm watching like I'm in someone else's body.

This can't be happening. It can't be.

I brought her cookies that chef made. I grabbed her favorite books from the airport store before I took off. I had a night planned that would involve us entwined together for hours intimately. I knew something wasn't right when I talked to her on the phone. I should've called her back.

I should've told her I loved her. I could've.

Any time.

Any day.

For all these years.

I roar as the powers of her bloodline transfer to me. Unlike the first time, that is slow and agonizing, with each subsequent

Alpha, it's like water to a sponge, soaking up every atom, every bit of transferable energy.

It's done quickly.

"No. No. Nooo!" I scream. I just left her this morning. I can still scent her on my skin. She can't be gone. She can't leave me.

This can't be happening!

James thumps her chest. Once. Twice. Then again. "I need a defibrillator!" One of our packmates scrambles out of the room like those medical devices are just lying around on the

street.

James continues the CPR. He can huff and puff and pound her chest, but he needs to stop beating on her body so roughly. I snarl. He needs to stop the compressions. She may be gone,

but he shouldn't hurt her.

"Enough," I growl.

But James ignores me.

Across the room, Liam bleeds out onto the marble floor. I want to drag him back to life just to kill him again. He killed her. This

woman who is bound to me.

Bound...to me.

A thought takes root.

I crawl across the floor to my wife and haul her back into my arms. "We can still save the baby, Aaron. We have to try."

My canines drop and James gapes at me. "Nooo!"

But I don't think. I just bite into her neck, the same burned, blackened skin that tastes of blood and death and ash.

I tear my mouth free and bite my own wrist open until I'm bleeding freely. Over her wounds, over her mouth and into it.

"Damn it, no, Aaron! She's gone! You can't turn her!"

But it's too late.

I've started the transition. But not in the normal way. I've taken her blood and marked her with mine.

I've mated her.

A human...no longer of this world.

My wolf howls and merges, leaching from my soul into Leah's body.

I will drag her back from death. Or follow her there....