

## **Bad Love 151**

### Chapter 151

JAMES

“SONOFABITCH!!!”

Aaron is convulsing.

His arms and legs are flailing and for a 6’4” beast of man, he can do a lot of damage. Our men can handle it.

His wife...

Gods.

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Leah’s eyes are open and unseeing. Aaron has her hand clasped in his and I wonder if they walk the same space or if that peace beyond life is as simple as one breath to the next.

Nothing to mourn or hope for.

Just silence and darkness.

One thing’s for sure... if he follows her, it’ll cause chaos.

“Get your ass back here, bro,” I growl, and because I’m so pissed that he could be so f\*\*king reckless, I slap his face to try and anger him back to his senses.

It do

Our men are anxious and gaping at me. They’ve never lost an Alpha. Not in battle and not even in succession. Aaron’s grandfather transferred the role to him at an early age. Pack Rathborn has been beneath Aaron’s control for two decades.

There are police sirens outside and that’s going to be a mess to deal with.

“Get them up and out the back.”

There are boats outside and while that might cause a whole shitstorm of trouble-the whole evading police and fleeing a crime scene variety of charges-we can’t stick around and wait for my Alpha to do...whatever it is he’s trying to do.

I think back long and hard on every text of our Archives I’ve ever read.

Wolves have been transitioned. Wolves have been ‘saved’ by a mating bond.

But no wolf in existence has been mated to a dead human and survived it.

The very act that Aaron has committed is an abomination.

I worry at the consequences.

"The canisters are ready." One of the men pulls a tab off one and it lights instantly.

"Haul them out," I order. Then I light the remaining fuses.

I stand at the back of the warehouse and wait for the flames to catch, then flee out the back as they engulf the place.

Burning Liam, this building and all evidence.

6 Months later

The air is cool. It carries the scent of winter.

But that doesn't make sense.

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Summer had barely begun.

There's music in the background. Classical music, Für Elise by Beethoven.

I sit up slowly.

My body feels awkward. My muscles ache with an odd discomfort that doesn't hurt, per say, but it's a clumsiness that

makes me feel like a colt new to walking. My head is heavy and my balance is off.

I stumble and when I stand I almost fall back down again.

But I get moving, one foot in front of the other.

There's a balcony and door is partly open, letting in the cold-and snow. The flakes scatter on the carpet before melting.

My feet are bare and the contrast of cold and warm is invigorating.

I open the French doors and step out. The sun is shining even as the wind and snow blow. His back is to me.

But I'd know those strong shoulders anywhere.

He turns slowly, sensing my presence. "It's about time you woke up."

Aaron stalks toward me.

My hair is unbound. It's long. Like really long. I'm draped in some full length nightgown that an 80 year old might wear.

His hand touches my face and I gasp.

His touch is as brief as one of those snowflakes. Kissing my skin then melting into the air.

He walks past me back inside.

"Aaron?"

My voice is raspy and I try to clear my throat. "Aaron. Don't go."

He pauses near the door of his bedroom. I'm in his house. I try to hurry to catch up to him, but I'm dizzy and have to cling to the wall so not to fall.

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He moves toward me like he might catch me and then pauses.

I hold my head. I have visions. Memories.

Splintered images of blood. And pain.

Betrayal and loss.

Someone calling my name in the dark. Dragging me back from the abyss.

I have so many questions...

"I have to go, Leah. Ask one of our staff to fill you in."

That hurts. I don't know what I expect, but it isn't for him to be so...distant.

"Aaron, Please."

He hesitates again. His huge body visibly shudders. Is it the man, his wolf?

He told me he loved me. He held me. My last memories are of only him.

"Why are you pushing me away?" Darkness creeps into my mind, teasing at the edges

of n

my consciousness. If it engulfs me, I'll drown. I need him. He's my tether to this world. I love him and I need to touch him, to know that this is real and not some figment of my mind, because I've been adrift for so long.

"Please," I call to him. "Don't leave me alone..."

His dark eyes are anguished. His muscles flex and his wolf surfaces in a flash of gold. Then his irises darken again. "I'm sorry," he mutters before charging out the door. It closes with a resounding click and I sink to the floor. Tears gather in my eyes.

Then a voice echoes from within: Whoever said you were alone?

Chapter 152

The tears continue to fall, dampening my face and my neck, down into the cotton of the nightgown, but I am frozen.

That voice.

So familiar, yet so foreign.

A pressure. Against the inside of my chest.

I bring my hand up over my heart.

My wolf

My wolf is within me.

Unbound. Alive.

A comforting, filling presence so complete, I have no idea how I lived without her until now.

But there's something else.

A longing, a tugging.

An invisible force urging me to chase after Aaron and be with him, no matter what.

Something soul deep that cannot be explained.

Are we...mated?

But when?

How?

I force my mind into those broken, violent memories, trying to clearly recall what happened.

Liam.

Betrayal.

Blood. so much blood.

James, begging me to stay alive.

Telling him to save the baby-

My son

My hands drop to my stomach.

My flat stomach.

No sign I ever carried that tiny life inside me at all.

In that moment, everything else becomes inconsequential as I force myself up to unsteady feet and rush out of the room.

I have to know.

I need to know what happened to our son.

I arrive at the bottom of the stairs and almost run headlong into James, who catches me before I can go down.

He stares at me with worry in his eyes.

"Whoa, Leah, take it easy. When did you wake up? You shouldn't be out of bed."

I pull out of his steadying hold, my chest heaving as I try to catch my breath.

"Where did Aaron go?" I demand.

In my chest, my wolf is bristling, not liking the distress I'm in, ready to burst out and protect me from whatever this world throws at me.

It's a weird feeling, but a comforting one.

"Your eyes-" James says instead, and I realize they must be glowing gold from my wolf being so close to the surface.

"Where is Aaron?" I bite out, not knowing if this newfound aggression is my wolf, or the wrath of a mother missing her child.

James takes a step back from me, as if expecting the worst.

#### Chapter 153

"Left?" I practically shout, rage and grief surging up within me. "Where did he go?"

And before James can even answer that question, "Where is my baby?!"

James looks away from me.

But not before I see the grief.

The reluctance.

The wish to be anywhere but here, having this conversation with me.

"James," I whisper brokenly, because from that one look I know.

I know what became of my baby, and I can't hear it.

I wish I was dead.

That's what was meant to happen.

I was meant to die, but my baby, my son, was supposed to live and unite the Roberts and Rathbom packs in a way they never had been before.

My child was supposed to live where I couldn't.

And now-

Now I had my wolf, yes, but my Alpha powers are gone.

I felt them leave my body. In those horrible moments at the warehouse, it wasn't just my life force that was leaving me, but the lineage my father left me too.

And Aaron.

He has landed the final insult.

Aaron had turned me, saved me, maybe even mated me. All at the expense of our child.

And then as soon as I'd woken up, he'd walked away like I didn't even matter.

Ask one of our staff to fill you in, he'd said, like I wasn't even worth the time it would take him to explain.

Anger and grief and sadness and a million other emotions bubble up within me, and it's too much.

Too much for one person to handle.

I drop to the floor in the middle of the foyer, right there at the bottom of the stairs I've walked up and

down a million times since |  
came here as a child.  
And then I start screaming..  
James calls my name, crouching down next to me, hesitantly reaching out like he doesn't know whether to touch me.  
I wrench away from him.  
My grief and fury will not be appeased by anyone or anything.  
And then something else starts happening.  
My wolf  
She shoves up inside me like a rising tide of power and hunger.  
I feel my skin ripple. Then my muscles clench and release.  
Then my bones are moving beneath my skin.  
Then there's more things happening at once than I can catalog, but within moments, it's like I sink into this warm, calming place, retreating from the world around me.  
I feel my body moving in a new way.  
Getting up onto four paws. Shaking out my fur.  
The wolf is in charge now, and she is furious  
She leaps into the air, straight at James, who doesn't see it coming.  
I take him down to the floor, my wolf a more solid weight than I'll ever be.  
And then she's clawing and biting with rage, until there's a shout from nearby, and other pack members come running. I leap off James, tasting blood in my mouth, and it makes me want to hunt. To find an outlet for all these furious emotions inside me  
My wolf whirls around and starts bounding toward the door, intending to run.  
I'm glad for it. My wolf can't feel human emotions, not the kind that were sucking me under just moments ago.  
And while she's in charge, I feel safe, like it's okay for me to let go of everything, just for a little while.  
It'll still be there after my wolf  
has run and returned control to me.  
I trust her.  
More than I trust anyone else in my life right now.  
Maybe even more than I trust myself.  
Adam has arrived and is yelling my name, telling me not to go, begging me to stay, to shift back so we can talk  
Huh. So Aaron could always understand me whenever I spoke to his wolf.  
He just never chose to acknowledge it.  
I ignore Adam and bound toward the open door, out into the cold sharp winter sunshine of Montana.

Chapter 154

AARON

The drive to the cabin has never felt so long.  
More than ever, I'm reminded of that night I brought Leah up here,  
How beautiful and responsive she'd been beneath my hands and my cock.  
How I could make her scream and beg for me.  
But then everything that happened after, her father and that phone call, and then the shock of it all sending her into some kind of serious medical episode and I'd thought I was going to lose her.

My chest aches-both my heart and my wolf-longing for the woman and my mate.  
I now know what had been going on in front of my eyes the whole time.  
The truths that women kept from me.  
The cancer.  
Dying.  
And finally, our son.  
How could she?  
I know I'm not a saint, but I won't ever apologize for the things I'd done to protect Leah and my pack.  
But the things Leah has lied about?  
How could I ever get past those intimate betrayals?  
Worse, it was one of the only two rules I'd given her when she'd been a child brought to my pack as a sacrifice for peace.  
Don't ever run from me.  
And don't lie.  
Well, she certainly took that rule and broke it into a million pieces.  
However, much of the rage I feel at a constant simmer these days is directed at myself.  
Because as much as I'm hurt and angry about the things Leah has done, I can't deny I've made my own mistakes where she is concerned.  
Mistakes that have consequences for not just the two of us, but both of our packs.  
And that's the one thing I vowed never to do after things that happened during the war.  
Things I've seen my own parents and other mated wolves do, when they put their mating bond above the safety and priorities of the pack.  
I've already broken my vow once.  
  
I will not do so again.  
And that means staying as far away from Leah as possible, even if we are mated.  
Even if I ever could forgive her for what she's done.  
There is only one person and one place I feel any kind of peace these days, where I can tell myself I'm doing the right thing, and in the long run, it will be for the better.  
I finally arrive at the remote cabin.  
I've made some alterations since I moved here. Improved the road coming in and out, as well as renovating and slightly extending the building so it's more comfortable to live in on a permanent basis.  
I park my SUV and climb out, the sun setting over the distant mountains.  
My wolf is restless and angry because I forced us to leave our mate behind.  
All my wolf wants is Leah, consequences be damned.  
I'll have to run later, probably for hours, to let out even a fraction of that tension and aggravation.  
But first....  
I need to see my one true love.  
I walk into the cabin, warmth and buttery light spilling out when I open the door.  
This feels like home now.  
But an incomplete home, my wolf insists.  
As I step inside, Lillian steps out from the generous bedroom I added to the building. Soft, soothing music comes from within the room, along with the scent of family and pack  
It was an easy choice, in the end, deciding on her.

She is demure and patient, blessing everyone around her with endless smiles and kindness. I feel bad that I forced her to leave the pack behind and live out here in the middle of nowhere with me. I smile, relief washing over me as I say, "I'm so glad to see you."

## Chapter 155

### SIX MONTHS AGO

I wake with a start, my heart jacked up, panic coursing through my blood, my wolf howling to be released so we can continue shredding our enemies.

Except I have to save her.

Leah.

She is my world, and I refuse to let her die.

I will shred the Grim Reaper himself with my claws and my fangs if that's what it takes.

However, I blink, recognizing the medical annex of my own packlands in Montana.

The sight clashes confusingly with my last memory of being in that warehouse and following Leah into the maws of death in a desperate last-minute attempt to save her.

I survived, somehow, when I expected death.

Now that the fight is over and I am faced with the cold light of day, I can't believe the choices I made.

How I did the one thing I'd always vowed not to do.

Why I never planned to mate her-besides the fact she didn't have her own wolf

I put the life and fate of one woman over myself and my pack.

Above my responsibilities as Alpha.

Above the people who depend on me for their life and safety.

What would have become of both the Roberts and Rathborn packs if both Leah and I had perished in that warehouse?

However, the knowledge that I'd been about to lose her had somehow overridden every commonsense I'd ever possessed.

But what of Leah?

As if by magic, thoughts of her make me aware of this tether binding the heart and soul of my wolf.

I realize with a start that I can sense her.

I can sense her wolf.

She is indeed alive, but weak, and nearby.

I determinedly climb out of bed, even though my legs protest holding me upright.

I rip at the cannula and various cards attached to me, until I'm free, setting off all kinds of alarms.

I force my legs to take me toward the doorway of the room I'm in, however before I can get there, the door opens. Both Adam and my own pack doctor come rushing in.

"Aaron!" my physician admonishes. "You shouldn't be out of bed."

"I need to see her," I growl.

My wolf is pushing and pushing and pushing me to go find her. Sight her, scent her, touch her, calm this wildness burning within

US.

"Aaron, what you did-" Adam begins. "No wolf has ever done that before. It shouldn't have even been possible. You and Leah should both be dead. We don't know what the long term consequences will be-

"I don't care!" I roar, and I know my eyes must be glowing, my claws lengthening and my fangs threatening to emerge.

This.



This was why I abhorred the idea of mating.  
I resent some force outside of my control dictating my actions.  
My wolf, however, wants to embrace it wholeheartedly.  
I press my hand into my chest, willing my wolf to calm the hell down before one of the doctors decides we need to be restrained.  
“Just let me see Leah. Please,” I try in a more reasonable tone.  
The doctors share a look, before returning their attention to me.  
“Only for a few minutes,” Adam tells me, like he has any authority over what I do.  
I now possess the power of three Alphas. Even most of the wolves on the council would be hard pressed to stop me if I decided to go through them.  
Adam might as well be an ant  
But I don’t tell him this.  
I simply nod and let him take me across the hall into Leah’s room.

## Chapter 156

### PRESENT DAY

#### LEAH

I run until the sunsets and the lands come alive with the sounds and scents of night.  
My wolf is intrigued, and wants to keep running with the moonlight reflecting off the snow, but I promise her we’ll come back out here another night.  
Right now, we are both hungry and tired.  
Although, my exhaustion is the deep emotional type, from all I’ve had to endure these last weeks- Except then I remember it’s been months, and a new kind of sadness overtakes me.  
My wolf howls mournfully, the sound echoing lonely into the night.  
Eventually she takes us home, her sense of direction unerring.  
When we arrive, it’s to find a flurry of activity, with James and Adam standing at the center of it all. James is all healed, but his clothes are still torn and bloody, and as soon as I see him, I feel terrible for what I did.  
I don’t realize my wolf is handing the reins back to me until it’s too late, until I am shifting, and then climbing to my feet, naked in front of half a dozen packmates.  
Naked in front of both Adam and James.  
Neither of them bother to hide how their gazes move over my body.  
I feel heat rushing up my neck to my cheeks as I blush.  
I want to cower and try to cover myself.  
But I am a wolf now, this is part of my reality.  
I’ve seen other packmates moving back and forth between the shift. That nakedness is a natural state of being most of them don’t even notice any longer.  
Nudity has certainly never bothered Aaron before.  
Not in front of me. And not in front of any other number of people.  
Not in front of Jessica, certainly.  
Thinking of the woman who claimed my husband, my mate, before me, and who still had designs on him makes my wolf bristle, and I feel a growl rumbling up within me that I have to fight hard to keep down.  
Wow.  
My wolf is fierce and possessive.  
“What’s going on?” I ask, striving to keep my voice calm.

Both Adam and James jerk their gazes back to my face.

"You went missing, that's what!" Adam says, looking pissed off, while James quickly moves to the couch in a nearby room to grab a blanket for me.

I reach out to take it from him, but instead he drops it around my shoulders for me.

I murmur a thank you, trying not to wonder if the way his fingers brushed my skin was on purpose or not. I owe him an apology for mauling him earlier, but I can't bring myself to voice the words.

These wolves around me have assumed too much. Taken too much.

I am a Luna. I was an Alpha.

I don't like that they think they can control me or tell me what to do. And my wolf, she isn't having any part of it.

"I went for a run. I have a wolf now. I can do that," I tell Adam, remaining calm in the face of his anger, even though out of everyone here, I have the most right to be pissed off at the moment.

"You went for a run?" Adam demands. "Leah, until you woke up today, we didn't know if you were ever going to wake up again. We don't know what the long term implications are of what Aaron did."

"And what exactly did Aaron do?" I cut in, my voice icy and sharp. "Who the hell let him mate me, turn me, when the one thing I wanted was the life of my child to be saved?"

"Leah, there was no stopping him," James replies in a quiet voice. "Believe me, I tried. I tried to do what you said, to keep you alive long enough to save the baby, but Aaron--"

"None of that matters now, it was months ago," Adam says dismissively.

And wow, that hurts.

Because for me it wasn't months ago that I lost my baby.

It feels like yesterday.

"Right now, what matters is your health," Adam continues, but it's like I can't hear him any longer, and my wolf is pushing back up again, trying to protect me from the feelings that seem like they're deep enough and strong enough to drown me.

I'm really going to have to get a handle on living with this second presence, on learning some control so she's not ready to burst out and take over at any given second.

Aaron made it look so easy, and I know his wolf is stronger than most.

I feel the shift coming on again, and Adam abruptly stops talking.

"No, Leah, you can't shift and run off again!"

I want to answer, but honestly, my wolf is already too close to the surface.

However, Adam suddenly springs forward, and then I feel a sting in my neck.

I feel woozy as he steps back again, and James is suddenly there, easily lifting my weight into his arms.

For a second, I wish it was Aaron.

"I'm sorry, Leah," Adam is saying. "But this is for your own good."

It's the last thing I hear before everything goes black.

## Chapter 157

I don't know how much time has passed when I wake up in Aaron's bed once again, but daylight is shining through the curtains

once more, so at least the night must have passed.

This time, I'm not in a rush to get up.

What's the point?

My baby is gone, and I don't even know what the point of me being alive is

It seems so cruel that I survived where he didn't.

After a moment, I roll over, and don't realize I'm trying to scent Aaron on the pillows until I'm already doing it.

I growl at myself, annoyed.

Or maybe I should be more annoyed with my inner wolf, since it's her obsession with her mate that keeps me longing for him.

Longing for a man who I think I hate now.

I loved him for so long, hating him almost feels the same.

Deep, passionate, all-consuming.

A fire burning within me.

He is to blame for me losing my child, and I don't know if I can ever forgive him for that.

But even as I think these things, my wolf is longing for him in a way that leaves my body aching.

Anyway, the pillows don't smell like him anymore.

So has he simply been sleeping in another bedroom?

Or is he not even living on Rathborn pack lands any longer?

What did James mean when he said Aaron left yesterday?

Eventually I sit up, and find a pitcher of ice water and a platter of fruit, crackers and cheese sitting on the nightstand.

My stomach rumbles, and I realize I am ravenous.

I begin devouring the food, and somehow it tastes better than anything I've ever eaten. I can distinguish flavors in a way I never have before. I also realize I can hear people moving around in the house, and pick up scents my human nose hadn't even realized existed.

Being human was like living in standard definition.

Now that I have my wolf, I'm living in super-high def.

I never realized how much I was actually missing out on by not having my wolf.

Just as I finish with the food, the door opens and James walks in.

I pull the sheet up around myself, since whoever put me in bed hadn't bothered to dress me.

"Good, at least you've got your appetite back." James walks over and sits on the bed. Right away, I can see the guilt in his eyes, and I try not to let it soften me. "I'm sorry, Leah. For everything. You have to know I'd do anything to change things, to be able to give you back your child. But I can't say I'm sorry that you're here now and alive.

"It's not your fault, James," I reply, a lump in my throat.

"That night- he begins haltingly, but I hold up my hand.

"I don't want to talk about it right now. I can't talk about it. Maybe later, but not today."

"Promise you won't run off like that again," James says, searching my features intently. "Rathborn pack lands might have the highest security, but you know from experience that it's not infallible.

I nod, drawing my knees up and wrapping my arms around them.

"How long has it been, James? How long was I asleep for?"

"Six months," James replies, his voice a low rumble. "Like Adam said, we didn't know if you were going to ever wake up."

"It's a miracle that I have my wolf now."

Despite how I'd gotten her, I couldn't regret that I'd gotten to experience life with her, like it should have been from the start if my father hadn't bound her in some twisted act of either protecting me, or

striking at Aaron.

"We're not sure-nothing like this has ever happened before in the history of all the packs-but we think it was Aaron claiming you at the last second that did it. Becoming your mate unbound your wolf. Between the mate bond tethering you to this world through Aaron, and then your wolf fighting to the surface, you survived. You'd died, Leah."

"I know."

"I get that this is awful, but you need to know that Aaron could've died too. He risked his life to bring you back from the depths. He followed you over, Leah. We weren't sure either of you would survive." I feel that to my bones.

And I know that. I do. "I understand."

James looks reflective. "Then why are you so angry?"

"James...I asked Aaron to turn me. Many times when we first married. I wanted to have my wolf. I wanted to be whole, so he could mate me. So we could have a family. Our lives everything could've been so different!"

If he had put his pride and all those arrogant machinations aside, and allowed our marriage to be what it should have been all along, then maybe I would now be holding our child in my arms. I certainly wouldn't have ever gotten sick with cancer. Maybe I would still be Alpha and Liam wouldn't have been able to betray me like he had.

I wonder, now, if my father thought that transferring his Alpha powers to me would somehow unbind my wolf and restore me.

I guess I'll never know.

"And he has my powers now, right? Aaron has assumed control of my family's pack."

James looks away from me. He nods, still avoiding my gaze, his feelings of guilt plain as day.

Despite James's tough looks, he is a good man-good wolf-at heart, who is willing to carry the weight of things, whether he's directly responsible for them or not.

Aaron could stand to take a leaf or two out of his book.

But Aaron probably deserves his ego now. Is there another Alpha more powerful? Not on this continent. Maybe not in the world.

There was a good chance that should Aaron decide to challenge for a seat on the Council, no other wolf would stand a chance against him, even the oldest, most powerful wolves amongst them.

"So Aaron must be busy, being the Alpha of three packs," I say, and yet again, my voice is bitter. "How is he managing that?"

"Remotely, mostly," James replies. "He's not living here anymore, Leah. He hasn't for months now"

That stings. More than I want it to.

"Then where is he living?" I can't help but ask.

My wolf is upset that her mate won't be under the same roof as her.

Not even on the same lands, apparently.

I try to tell her it's for the best, but she doesn't want to listen to me.

She's stubborn, my wolf, but I suppose that shouldn't be a surprise given my own personality.

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"I'm sorry, Leah," James says, getting to his feet. "I can't tell you. Everything Aaron wants you to know is ready for you, down in his office, whenever you're ready to look at it."

"What's the point?" I mutter, feeling another wave of sadness go over me as I remember my lost child out of nowhere.

Is this what it's going to be like for the rest of my life?

Battling these overwhelming waves of despair that make my heart feel like it's cracked into a million pieces and can never be put back together?

How does any parent survive losing a child?

"The point is that you're still part of this pack, one of us," James says firmly, but not unkindly. "I can't imagine the pain of losing your baby, Leah. But the pack needs you to find strength for them now. The pack needs their Luna." Chapter 158

After James leaves-and I am left sitting there startled by the reminder of who I am to the pack-I force myself to get up and dress

I go upstairs to my old room where my clothes still are, to pick out something comfortable, yet stylish-jeans and a softly knitted sweater. It seems silly to worry about clothes when my life feels like it got put through a blender.

I glance around the room as I dress, remnants of both the child and the woman who grew up here, confused, alone and desperately dreaming things could be different, easy to see in the pictures and books and splashes of color.

I feel like a completely different person now, like I don't belong in this space any longer.

Like everything that happened in the warehouse that night-dying, turning, mating, losing my child-has rebirthed me into someone I don't recognize.

Maybe it's not for the worst.

That girl loved a man who refused to love her back. A man who treated her in extremes. Worshiping her body in one moment, being guardedly possessive the next, then acting like I didn't exist, disregarding my feelings, flaunting Jessica in front of me, yet at the same time, teaching me everything I needed to know to thrive in this world, but then finding ways to use it against me like when he had me trick my own father....

That girl lived in a maelstrom of chaos.

That girl had no idea what was coming for her.

This girl is going to learn from the past.

This girl is going to be strong. For herself. For her pack

I leave the room and head down to Aaron's office.

The normality of the house after everything that's happened is almost jarring.

The chef is in the kitchen preparing a meal, another pack member is doing some routine cleaning, my newly sensitive hearing picks up the low tones of James talking to another couple of guys somewhere within the house.

Of course, for them, months have gone by and apart from Aaron apparently not being here, I guess things quickly returned to normal for them.

They haven't been through life changing traumas like I have.

Inside Aaron's office, I have to pause for a moment.

In here, his scent is everywhere.

Not only his cologne and the soap he uses, but the earthier undertones that are simply him.

A visceral wave of longing goes through me, stronger than any lust I experienced as a human. It's almost crippling, and I have to sit down as I realize this is what a wolf longing for her mate feels like

It's something we'll have to get used to feeling, because I don't plan to go running after Aaron any time soon. And after the way he walked out on me not five minutes after I woke up, I get the feeling he won't

come looking for me either.

That hurts.

Eventually, I make myself get up and go over to my old desk, the one Aaron had set up in here so I could spend days looming,

2/2

and later working with him.

There's a brand new laptop sitting on my desk, and curiously I turn it on.

It loads quickly, and I find it's been cloned from my old laptop, so everything is arranged and organized the way I've always kept

However, there's a new folder on the desktop that wasn't there before, simply titled For Leah

I open it to find a scrolling list of all kinds of documents, in number order, I assume of how I'm meant to read them.

I click on the first, and suck in a breath at the words that meet my eyes.

Aaron has made me Luna-of all three packs.

Chapter 159

I suppose I shouldn't be surprised.

I am still his wife, no matter how many times I told him I want a divorce.

But three packs?

It's nearly as unheard of as a single Alpha absorbing the power of three Alphas.

I start reading then, more and more information unfolding in front of me.

Aaron has left the day to day running of each pack to me. He really has been doing the bare minimum remotely for the past few months, and since I know Aaron likes to keep busy-thrives on it, actually-I wonder what he's been doing with all his time.

He's left instructions for me to take up the reins of fully running both Roberts Corp and his own businesses, and I see that in the time I was in the coma, he has seen through my vision to turn the Roberts Corp building into apartments and has made the business profitable again.

What I can't find any mention of, and the one thing I really need to know about, was the billion-dollar AI weapons system my

brother had been developing in secret.

It's going to take me at least a day to go through all of these documents properly, probably weeks of working and visiting in person to bring myself up to speed with where the business and packs are at.

And on top of all that, I might also be facing the problem that people won't easily accept my leadership in Aaron's absence.

After all, how many years have I been Luna of the Rathborn pack, and they've barely tolerated me, let alone respected me enough to listen to anything I had to say.

However, that was before I had a wolf of my own.

Now I can run with them.

I can stand toe-toe with them, look them in the eye, and demand the respect I deserve.

Footsteps bring my attention up from the computer, and I see Adam stepping into the room.

As soon as I see him, I realize he sedated me yesterday to stop me turning and running again, and I can't care that he thinks it was for my own good.

"What do you want?" I ask flatly before he's more than two steps into the room.

He hesitates for half a second, and he looks upset, like he feels bad for all that has happened.

"I can understand why you're upset, Leah, with me and everything that's happened to you," he says,

walking the rest of the way over and then sitting in a spare chair positioned next to my desk. Aaron used to sit there sometimes, when he would patiently instruct me on business strategy or stock dealings. That side of him had always confused me-so different to his cold indifference or callous disregard, even different again to when he took me to his bed and worshiped my body until I fell apart again and again-and I used to long for more of it, always trying to come up with excuses for him to sit in that chair.

"Leah," he continues, reaching over to take my hand. "I think you should come home. Back to Roberts pack lands. Where you belong."

I snatch my hand away. "I don't know where I belong anymore, Adam."

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The truth of it is too harsh, and I have to swallow down my emotions or else my wolf will come rushing up to take control again.

No, I don't know where I belong.

But I know what my responsibilities are.

And unlike Aaron who apparently decided it would be easier to simply leave and manage things from afar, I am determined to stay and do the work that needs to be done.

Right now, keeping myself busy is the only way I can see getting through the pain and confusion.

Adam sits back, clearly disappointed.

"Will you at least come down to the medical annex so I can give you a check up?"

"It's been six months, I'm told... so I'm assuming the cancer is gone. Or I'd be dead."

He nods.

Wolves regenerate and I feel the difference in not just my body but my mind too. I'm stronger. Powerful in ways I have yet to comprehend.

I glance at the computer screen, and think there's not much else I can do here today. I need to get out into the pack and talk to the members. Go to California and check in with our business associates. God only knows what they must be thinking if Aaron

hasn't shown his face in months. Especially the human ones.

I need to go and reassure them, because rumors about bad business practices and absent CEOs can tank share prices just as

easily as actual mismanagement can.

"I just want to make sure you're okay," Adam says. "Please, come to the lab."

"I'm not interested in any more tests," I tell him. "And the next time you sedate me or try to control me in any way, I swear it'll be the last thing you do."

He nods begrudgingly. "I only sought to protect you."

I sense that he genuinely means it. Like Aaron and even James, they're all in a hurry to protect me.

I only wish they'd done the same thing for my child.

## Chapter 160

I message James and ask him to get the jet ready, then I go pack

As I'm tugging my luggage out of my room, James appears out of nowhere, dressed in fresh clothes and holding his own luggage.

He hurries over to take mine as well.

"Where do you think you're going?" I demand, probably more of a bit ch about it than I need to be.

But between my grief and my wolf, all of my emotions are heightened in ways I've never experienced

before,

"Where you go, I go," James announces stubbornly, and the look on his face is just daring me to argue. I got off easy with James earlier, I know this.

His wolf probably outweighs mine by a hundred pounds-although James still isn't as big as Aaron-and when I shifted and impulsively attacked him, he didn't even shift himself. He'd remained human and let me take out my anger and anguish on him. If he had decided to shift and fight back, I probably would've been dead in a matter of seconds.

"Did Aaron put you up to this?"

My wolf is wishing Aaron was the one standing in front of us, declaring he planned to be where we are. I shove her down, and warn her to stop longing for things that cannot be.

"What difference does it make?" James asks defiantly.

"I guess you got me there," I mutter. "Okay, come on then, but don't slow me down."

"Wouldn't dream of it, Luna," James replies in amusement, following me down the stairs with both our bags.

We're soon in the car, and James is driving the SUV out of Rathborn packlands, his hands sure and steady on the wheel.

For a moment, as I take in his handsome profile, I can't help but wonder what it'd be like to have someone like James as my mate instead of the ever mercurial Aaron.

My wolf doesn't like it, and I can feel her rumbling her displeasure in my chest. I reach up to rub my stemum, frowning.

"Everything okay?" James asks, cutting his attention between me and the road.

"Everything is fine," I assure him. "Just getting used to sharing my insides with a wolf."

James barks a quick laugh at my description, and I realize it's a sound I haven't heard often.

"Yeah, I guess that'll take some getting used to after thinking you were only human for so long." He pauses, and I can see his mind turning over his thoughts. "I always thought if your wolf ever rose, she would be fierce and beautiful." He cuts me another quick look, and I feel my cheeks heating. "I'm glad I was right."

I don't know what to say to that, so I don't say anything, but James is smiling, I think at the way I'm blushing.

I turn my attention out the window.

It's only been a few days with my wolf, and already people are treating me differently.

Yes, maybe James had softened toward me in the weeks before Liam betrayed me, however, it wasn't that long ago when he used

to look at me with nothing but contempt, used to show his displeasure at having to deal with me.

2/2

It shouldn't have taken almost dying, losing my child and then gaining my wolf for people to see the real me, to treat me with basic humanity.

No one could ever see beyond what I represent

No one, except maybe Aaron.

I curse myself as soon as the thought comes up, unbidden, and think my wolf probably has something to do with it.

The only thing she wants is her mate-well, that and to protect me at all costs-but I can feel the depths of her longing radiating into me, confusing my own feelings where my husband is concerned.



I can't afford to be confused.

Aaron is gone.

I don't know where he is and James won't tell me.

This was what I wanted, right?

Maybe we haven't officially gotten divorced, but Aaron walked away, telling me nothing.

His silence, however, tells me more than words ever could.