

## Bad Love 161

### Chapter 161

I'm happy to arrive in California, though it doesn't distract me from my thoughts and recent past as much as I might like.

The new Roberts Corp apartments are amazing. Aaron has made my dream a reality. Not all of them are finished, of course, but the site manager takes me on a tour through the apartments that are completed and furnished, but don't have occupants yet. They soon will, however, as he tells me there's even a waiting list of people wanting to move in, because the homes have proven so popular.

"You made the right call on this, Leah," James tells me as I stand in a kitchen and imagine a family living happily here together, partly because I made it possible. "This had turned out better than anyone could have predicted. You should be proud."

I am proud, but also sad that my project is all but finished, and I didn't have a direct hand in bringing it to life.

The site manager says something about assuming I'll be staying in the Rathborn apartment and I look at James in confusion, who agrees on my behalf.

Once the site manager has gone back to his job, James leads me to the elevator.

"What Rathborn apartment?" I ask as soon as the elevator doors close.

James gently takes my hand and presses it onto a screen that turns out to be a security scanner. A new option pops up that wasn't available before-the upper floors.

James presses the button for one, and then the elevator silently whisks us upwards.

I don't bother asking again. James is quiet at the best of times, and I know he won't answer no matter how many times I ask

It was one thing I learned when I was still a kid and first arrived at the Rathborn mansion. No amount of trailing or pestering would get James to change his mind on anything.

I suppose he'd had a younger sister in Jessica, so he was used to those tactics. And lord knows she was way more annoying and insistent than I was.

The elevator arrives, not to a hallway lined with doors like I'm expecting, but a foyer, meaning this apartment takes up the entire floor. It's the size of eight apartments in one.

We step forward and again, James uses my hand on a palm scanner to open the door.

We step into a flood of evening Californian sun. The far wall is entirely windows, looking out over the valley.

"What is this?" I ask, looking around, noticing the small things.

Art hangs on the walls by artists I like. A color palette I would've put together if I was designing a living space for myself. Thick carpet, soft blankets, large, soft cushions scattered about on both the huge couch and floor. Even lush plants and one of those floating fireplaces that takes pride of place in the center of the living room.

"This is your home away from home, Leah," James says in a gentle voice. "Aaron designed it specially for you."

The knowledge that Aaron is behind this-a perfect space pulled straight from my dreams-hits me hard and fast.

"I think I need to lay down for a while," I say to James, my voice thick.

If he notices anything is wrong, he doesn't say so, but I don't wait for him to react anyway, I simply flee, and find my way to the master bedroom.

I collapse onto the bed in a mess of tears, crying until my throat is raw and my eyes are aching. Through all that, I think I can

catch a hint of Aaron's scent in the blankets, and wonder if he has stayed here recently. It only makes me cry harder.

Eventually, I fall into a fitful sleep, but thoughts of Aaron chase me into my dreams.

## Chapter 162

The bed shifts under Aaron's weight, and I open my eyes to see him looming over me, already naked. Somehow I knew it was him before I even saw him.

My wolf knows

She is practically purring now as Aaron's large hands land on my skin-somehow I'm naked as well.

"My mate," he says in a low voice. "Do you know how long I've wanted this? Wanted to claim my mate? Wanted to fuck my mate until she's undone and completely at my mercy?"

His words make me shudder, and I can only moan a response.

His eyes glow golden as he stares down at me, and it makes an answering swell of sharp longing rush through me.

Aaron's nostrils flare.

"I can scent your arousal. Just for me, isn't it? I'm the only one who can make you so wet, make you drench your panties without even touching you."

I nod frantically, hoping he'll touch me soon, needing him to soothe the ache building quickly inside me.

"Will you give me what I want, Leah?" Aaron asks, as he hitches a hand beneath my knee, and pushes my legs wide, exposing me to him.

"Yes," I moan, throwing my head back as his large fingers rake over my nipples and then knead my breasts.

Without warning, Aaron thrusts into me, hard and fast, and exactly how I need it.

I cry out, immediately overcome with sensation.

"Give me what I want, Leah," Aaron demands as he thrusts deep and powerful.

I have to raise one hand above my head to brace against the headboard of the bed, anchoring myself against the relentless surge of his hips against mine.

"Yes, yes, yes" I can only cry out as I let him take whatever he wants of me.

His fingers trail down my abdomen, and then he's pressing on my clit, and then I'm exploding in wave after wave of frantic pleasure.

I've barely come down when Aaron flips me over and tugs my ass into the air.

Then he's inside me again, and this time he's the one bracing a hand on the headboard for leverage as he pistons against me, while the evidence of my want for him drips down the backs of my thighs.

"Give me what I want, Leah," he repeats fiercely, and his voice is a growl, his wolf close to the surface, something he's never allowed to happen when we've had sex in the past.

My own wolf revels in it, panting for more.

"Whatever you want, Aaron," I tell him weakly, feeling the intense build up rising sky high within me again. I'll give you anything, everything." I continue, almost delirious by now.

Aaron's fingers delve between us, dragging my wetness up my ass. I only have time to gasp in half a breath before he's pushing

one, and then two fingers inside me and I'm overwhelmed and exploding once again. Aaron shouts, pinning me hard in place as he empties himself into me, making my insides clench like they want to milk him for every last drop. I collapse boneless to the mattress, while Aaron kneels above me, panting. Gently, he turns me over and I find myself staring up at him with hooded eyes. \*Give me what I want, Leah," he says once again, and now I'm confused. "What do you want, Aaron?" I ask, my voice hoarse from the way I'd screamed a few moments ago. Aaron's hand settles on my stomach. "My son."

#### Chapter 163

I wake up gasping, tears pricking my eyes. My body is a mess, shaking and weak and feeling sick, while my panties are drenched-just the way Aaron told me. I hate myself for it, but I shove my hand into my underwear, movements frantic until I come hard a second later, already on the edge because of that dream. Then I collapse back onto the pillows, and the tears come faster. What the hell kind of dream was that? I'm so messed up, I don't even know what I feel. I want Aaron-my wolf wants Aaron and his wolf-only because we are mated. Except then another wave of tears come, because I know that's not true. Is it possible to love someone and hate them at the same time? I know it is, because I'm living it right now. I miss him so much, and I think he is the only one who could truly understand the pain of losing our child, even though Aaron didn't know about our son until the last minute. Guilt burns hotly in my stomach for that. For how hurt Aaron must have been that I'd kept the pregnancy from him... The child was just as much his, he had every right to know sooner. And I'd meant to tell him. I'd planned to tell him, but there'd been so much going on, the time had never seemed right, and then my only brother had betrayed me. What must he think of me, keeping a truth like that from him? I wonder if that's part of why he's done with me, but I'm not brave enough to ask James. But it wasn't like Aaron was innocent in all of this. Maybe if he hadn't treated me so cruelly, if we'd had a solid foundation of trust in our relationship, then I would've felt able to tell him sooner. And that mistrust hadn't been wrong. When I'd needed him to do the one thing I wanted-save the baby instead of me-he'd ignored my wishes, and our son had paid the price. And for that, I know I will never be able to forgive him.

#### Chapter 164

Eventually I drag myself out of bed and take a shower, put on fresh clothes, and then venture out to the main room. James is sitting at the table with a laptop open. Being Aaron's second in charge keeps him busy. It also looks like he's texting someone. I want to ask if it's Aaron, my wolf is pushing the words to the tip of my tongue, but I stubbornly swallow them down.

"I'm going to the corporate floors," I tell James. "I'll be fine on my own."

He sends me an absent nod, too immersed in whatever he's working on to worry much about what I'm doing.

Lucky, because I'm not planning on going to the corporate floors at all. I'm going to the restricted floor where I spent weeks working alongside Liam, developing multi-billion dollar AI technology for the military, and hoping I get some answers about where things are at, and how it's been running since Liam is dead and I was in a coma for six months.

Dennis had proven to be very capable, and I'm sure he has managed just fine without either myself or Liam here to oversee things. However, before that night Liam had tried to take everything and been killed for his efforts, the project had been nearing completion, almost ready to hand over to the military. So has there been some kind of delay?

Or has the project finished and been delivered?

And if so, what exactly has happened to the billions of dollars Roberts Corp was meant to be paid for the contract?

It certainly isn't in any of our accounts.

Plus Aaron—even managing the packs and business remotely as he had been—would have noticed and been suspicious of a sudden multi-billion dollar influx to our bank accounts.

I tap my foot impatiently as the elevator takes me up to the restricted floor—again, only because I scanned my hand print. Aaron sure has stepped up security on this place since Liam's betrayal.

The elevator finally arrives on the restricted floor, and I'm required to scan my hand a final time before the door will even open.

When they slide apart and I step out onto the floor, I immediately stop, gasping at the sight I'm met with.

This was not what I was expecting.

I never imagined this is what I would be faced with....

## Chapter 165

The entire floor is empty. Not a single person, piece of equipment or furniture remains.

Absolutely everything is gone.

I do end up going to the corporate floors to see the board members and other high-ranking managers to double check things are running smoothly. It's clear our employees are happy to see me in person, and I silently curse Aaron yet again for the whole remote-management thing he's been doing the past months.

Morale among staff is hugely important. It can make or break a business, and clearly this is one area Aaron has been neglecting.

Aaron was the one who taught me that.

Again, I'm left wondering what state of mind he could be in, and what else could be occupying his mind to the point of letting basic business necessities slide.

However, the whole time I'm working, I'm trying not to panic about what I found on the restricted floor. Nothing.

It doesn't make sense.

Where the hell did everything go?

What happened to all the scientists and engineers and researchers and other staff who were working on that level?

Worse, I don't know who I can ask. I probably shouldn't ask, because like everyone who worked on that

floor, Liam had me sign on  
NDA

I try calling Dennis a few times, but his number has been disconnected.

I don't know if I should be worried or angry about that.

Is it possible Dennis stole everything, and struck out on his own after Liam was killed and I was out of commission?

Which possibly means he's now sitting on billions of dollars that rightfully belong to Roberts Corp if he did in fact finish the project and hand it over to the military.

The other options-the ones that involve Dennis finishing the project and selling it to the highest bidder on some kind of black market trade for even more billions than the military was willing to pay-doesn't bear thinking about.

I know I won't be able to live with myself and the part I played in it-small as it was-if this technology falls into the wrong hands and innocents are killed.

It was hard enough knowing the military was going to use it against people they deemed the 'enemy' in foreign countries. I never imagined I would be party to such senseless destruction; a completely new era in warfare.

The last hour or so, I've been trying to figure out who I can talk to or contact to help me figure out where the hell our billion dollar dangerous AI weapon system has gone.

My instincts keep pushing me to call Aaron, telling me he will help me no matter what has or hasn't happened between us because he will understand the seriousness of things and be able to put his feelings aside.

I know it's mostly my wolf who wants that.

Any excuse to bask in Aaron's presence.

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However, I've known Aaron since I was a child, so the human woman in me also knows how he would react, that he will be there

for me if I ask, no matter what.

Besides, Aaron owns half of Roberts Corp. If the worst happens and this is going to blow back on us in a bad way, then Aaron needs to know, needs to be prepared for what might be coming.

The problem is, I don't want to ask for his help.

I know I'm letting my own feelings get in the way of things.

But the stubborn independent part of me also wants to prove I can fix this mess on my own, without going running to my Alpha.

"So you are still up here."

I blink and look up to see James leaning against the doorframe of the office I'm using.

I realize it's become dark outside the windows, and I didn't even notice.

"Do you want me to order dinner up to the office, or are you coming down to the apartment to eat? We can cook something up together," James offers.

"You can cook?" I ask him in amusement.

He snorts in annoyance. "Of course I can cook."

"Order something to the plane-I think I feel like sushi-and we'll eat on the way back to Montana."

If James is surprised at my sudden rush to go home, he doesn't say so. He simply nods and leaves to do as I've asked.

I don't want to go back to that apartment and sleep in that bed again, with its lingering traces of Aaron's scent that make me have vivid dreams.

I'm satisfied with the work I've done here today. Besides, our employees were so happy to see me-even the human ones-it makes me think I need to go and visit the packs as soon as I can. Being Luna is an important role, and I want to ensure all the people who are looking to me that I can be there when they need me to be. That I take my responsibilities as their Luna deeply and with gratitude.

I'm glad for this work that keeps me moving.

It makes the constant pain in my chest a little more bearable.

## Chapter 166

We arrive back in Montana later that night and I'm exhausted.

But I'm glad for it, because hopefully it'll mean I'll fall straight into an exhausted sleep without dreams or grief disturbing me.

There's extra SUVs in the driveway, but I don't immediately think anything of it.

Not until I walk into the foyer and come face to face with Aaron.

We both freeze at the sight of each other.

My entire body lights up and my inner wolf is ecstatic.

This feeling, it's like I was living in some kind of half-light, and Aaron brought the sun, warming me and making everything bright and sharp.

Tension crackles in the air between us and Aaron's eyes immediately glow golden.

Next thing I know, every single other wolf-including James-has fled, leaving us standing alone.

In that second, I make a snap decision, though I'm sure it's mostly my wolf, the way she's pushing up and clamoring to get closer to him.

"I need to tell you something," I blurt out into the heavy silence.

"I heard you were in California. They didn't expect you back tonight, Aaron replies, not answering my statement. "Otherwise I wouldn't have come. I just needed a few things from my office and my bedroom."

"Please, it'll only take a minute," I say, wincing at the needy note in my voice.

What happened to my stubborn independence?

Aaron inclines his head stiffly and we walk to his office, keeping an impersonal amount of distance between us.

It's good, I think

I don't trust myself, or what my wolf will push me to do if we get closer.

"What do you need?" Aaron asks as soon as we're inside. He crosses his arms, closing himself off from me.

I used to think he was cold toward me, but now I know I was wrong.

The way he's treating me now is positively arctic.

"I need to tell you something," I say, still not sure I'm doing the right thing, but pushing ahead anyway. I don't have anywhere else to turn to for help.

"About things that were going on with Roberts Corp and Liam before he died."

At the mention of my brother's name, Aaron's features transform with utter fury.

He looks like he could happily dig up my brother's remains and slaughter him all over again.

"What about him?" Aaron bites out.

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"The whole thing about my father and brother wasting their money on booze and gambling and living a degenerate lifestyle? It was just a cover for where the money was really going."

"What do you mean?" Aaron asks, his brow creasing, and I can see I've got his attention.

"All of that money was being poured into a single, secret project on a restricted floor of the Roberts Corp building"

Now Aaron just looks confused. "Leah, are you sure? I ran Roberts Corp for months while you were-" He breaks off, his features hardening, as if he's gathering his resolve. "I ran your family business for months and I never even saw a hint of any secret project or restricted floor."

"Because it was a secret, Aaron," I reply impatiently. "But now we have a problem."

"We?" he repeats imperiously. "Your secret project has a problem and suddenly it's we?"

I clamp down on the urge to bite back at him.

This is bigger than both of us.

We need to put our animosity and hurt feelings aside, or the results could be catastrophic.

"The project was a military contract developing AI weapons systems. It was worth billions. And the night Liam betrayed me, it was almost finished."

Aaron stares at me, incredulous. "Billions?"

I glare at him bitterly, not surprised that's the detail he's focused on, since he had thought he'd brought my father and Pack Roberts to the financial brink by buying up shares and land before tricking me into leading my father into financial ruin and white collar business crime.

"Yes, Aaron, pack Roberts was set to make a huge financial windfall, despite your best efforts to ruin them. But that's not the point. The AI weapons system is dangerous. And when I went to California to find out what had been happening for the last six months since neither Liam nor I were there to oversee it, I found the entire floor cleaned out with no clue to where all the equipment and people working on the project went. I tried to call the head engineer, but his phone service has been cut off."

Aaron stares at me for a long minute, his features gradually hardening.

"This is bad, Leah."

"I know!" I reply, throwing my hands up. "That's why I'm telling you. Because you still own fifty-one percent shares, so technically you're on the hook if somehow, the tech has fallen into the wrong hands and is going to be used against the military we were supposed to hand it over to."

Aaron curses harshly, then steps sideways, picks up a chair and throws it with a roar into the nearest wall, making it splinter into a million pieces. I step back at the display of masculine fury, my heart racing. He's never been this out of control before.

He's always prided himself on keeping his emotions locked down.

What the hell is going on with him?

"Do you know what this could do to us?" he demands, fists clenched, eyes glowing. "To our reputations? To our businesses? To our lives? This could ruin us, Leah. Ruin absolutely everything we've built. How could you keep this from me?"

He laughs, then, bitterly.

"Oh, but I shouldn't be surprised, should I? After all, you didn't even think it necessary to tell me about my own son."

## Chapter 167

AARON

This woman.

This infuriating woman.

My wife. My mate.

She claimed to love me, once.

But nothing she's ever done would indicate she truly feels that deeply for me.

She flinches as I toss the barbed words about our son at her, and I take some dark satisfaction in that, even as my wolf howls in protest within me.

I can't believe that bastard Liam is still managing to ruin my life from beyond the grave.

I wish I could drag him back from hell, just so I can kill him all over again.

However, Liam is getting the last laugh, because I can't do that.

All I can do is clean up yet another Roberts pack disaster.

"Don't worry," I tell her in a cold voice. "I'll take care of your problems. Again."

At this, Leah's head snaps up, and for the first time, I see her eyes flash gold as her wolf surges up, threatening to rise up and take over

She's beautiful and fierce, and my own wolf is desperate for her.

"The way you took care of my problems last time?" she demands furiously. "The way you denied my one wish, that I should die if it meant saving our baby? If you want someone to blame for our situation, Aaron, then don't look to me. Take a good hard look in the mirror instead."

She strides forward, and for a second, I'm struck with the hope and furious disbelief that she might attack me, her mate and

Alpha.

However, she only pauses as she draws even with me.

"Our son is dead because of you. And I will never forgive you for that."

Guilt erupts through me like lava, blistering and burning through my veins.

But before I can say anything, she's stalked away to leave me standing here alone.

Fury gets the better of me again, and this time an entire desk falls prey to my paranormal strength. By the time it's nothing but splinters and kindling, I'm left panting, but not feeling any better about things. When I leave the room, I find James standing impassively in the corridor, not looking the least bit worried about me smashing up the furniture.

Of course, it's not the first time.

My own temper is only eclipsed by that of my wolf.

"How has she been?" I ask him, trying to keep my voice regulated.

James scowls and crosses his arms.

He doesn't need to say out loud that he thinks me abandoning my mate and running all the packs and business remotely is taking the coward's way out.

And maybe it looks that way from the outside, but I don't have a choice.

I had to keep the single most important person in my life safe, and I'd quickly found I was willing to do anything to make it possible, including letting people think I'd turned my back on them.

"She'd be better if her mate was helping her through her grief. Instead she's throwing herself into her work and running the packs that are supposed to be your responsibility, Alpha."



The way he uses my title makes it sound like an insult.

"Watch your tone with me, Beta," I growl as I step closer to him, bristling for a fight, but he doesn't take the bait.

Instead, he lowers his eyes in a show of submission.

"Keep me updated," I say, stepping back again. "And know that if anything happens to her, it's on you."

He glances up again briefly, a spark of wolf in his eyes, and I know he wants to argue back-James has grown more than a little fond of my wife, it seems, but he has to know if it even seems like he's thinking about crossing a line with her that I'll rip him to shreds-however, he only nods his agreement.

I walk away without another word, my thoughts already turning to this latest trouble with Roberts Corp and the AI weapons system.

I don't need this on top of everything else.

Not when my own plate is already full and I'm getting closer to my ultimate goal-finding Ryker, Michail, Dorian and any other wolves who'd been helping Liam that fateful night he'd tried to screw over my wife, and got dead for his troubles.

I don't care that they are Old Country Wolves.

I don't care how powerful they are.

I've absorbed the abilities of three Alphas.

I'm almost unstoppable.

So I will find them.

And then I'll make them pay.

## Chapter 168

After I leave Rathborn pack lands I organize the jet for myself and fly to California.

Not only do I want to see what I can find out about the Roberts Corp military contracts from some contacts I have within the government, but I also got word that Ryker was spotted in the city.

It's the first time any of the trio have surfaced since that night. Dorian went back to Gibraltar and probably won't leave again for another twenty years, Michail was rumored to be somewhere else in Eastern Europe, and Ryker... Well, no one has heard much of him, apart from a couple of bodies he apparently dropped in Texas, some kind of kill contract for a ruthless pack who runs half that state.

Not until a day ago, when I got reliable word that he'd been seen back in California.

Back in the same place where he'd been helping Liam in a plot that'd almost cost my wife her life.

A night that has cost me so much more.

I shake the thoughts away from my mind as I leave the restaurant I always eat at when I'm in the city.

The staff know me and are always reliable, whether I'm entertaining other wealthy business people and making deals, or simply enjoying a quiet meal on my own like I have tonight.

William is waiting in the car with a contingent of my men.

Since I ordered James to stay on Rathborn packlands and keep Leah secure, William has stepped up to act as my beta in James absence.

I probably should have brought them with me into the restaurant, but it attracts attention, bringing half a dozen armed bodyguards with me wherever I go.

With my abilities as strong as they are now, there's probably no need for that much man-power surrounding me all the time, despite the unknown threat I've been facing.

Any wolf would be foolish to challenge me outright.

They'd barely get to finish saying the words before I ripped them limb from limb, My phone pings in my pocket as I walk, and I pull it out to see a message from one of my government contacts, agreeing to meet with me.

I'm distracted, so it takes me a second to realize someone has followed me into the alleyway that runs along the side of the restaurant between the front entrance and the parking lot out back.

I pause and half-turn, scenting to see if I can pick up whether they're human or wolf, but they're downwind of me, and the nearby dumpsters are the only thing I can really smell.

But something-some kind of warning is prickling along the back of my neck-so I slip my phone away and fully turn to face them.

The person is wearing a jacket with the hood pulled up, face obscured by darkness and shadow. From the body shape, it's either a man or a tall woman, but the clothes are baggy and I can't see a more definite outline. They've also stopped and are standing there, staring straight at me. Not even trying to pretend like they weren't following me.

"What do you want?" I ask in a low voice, barely restraining the urge to bristle and growl a warning.

Won't do me any good if this person is human.

However, instead of answering, the person raises a gun, pointing straight at my heart.

## Chapter 169

"If you think a gun is going to slow me down, then you clearly have no idea who you're dealing with," I say, even daring to take a step forward. "So what is this? You going to mug me or something? Buddy, you picked the wrong man to follow into a dark alley"

I start forward, letting my claws slip down, but keeping my hands concealed at my side so they're obscured by the darkness because I still don't know if I'm dealing with a human or a wolf.

I've maybe taken four steps when they shoot, putting a couple of bullets into my chest. It hurts like hell, yeah, but it's not going to kill me, and right now, the only thing it's doing is pissing me off.

However, I take another few steps, and then I stumble as the pain hits me, and I smell the sickly acidic scent of my flesh melting and burning like it's been exposed to acid.

Fuck

The bullets are silver.

Worse, they're coated in wolfsbane.

I've got maybe seconds before my wolf starts forcing the change to heal me-the only way I'm going to survive this

I reach down and slap the emergency alert on my smartwatch so William and the rest of my guys will get the SOS, then turn and start staggering toward the parking lot.

I barely get three steps when I'm on my knees, and my muscles are shifting, bones snapping and rearranging, but I fight it, knowing if I succumb to the change here alone with a chest full of silver wolfsbane bullets, I'll be vulnerable.

The bastard who shot me strolls over and grabs a handful of my hair, wrenching my head back

I catch a glimpse of half his face, but don't recognize him, giving me no clue who might have sent him, what pack he might be from.

He smiles down at me cruelly.

"This is what happens when you gain too much power, Alpha Rathborn. Someone will always be waiting

in the shadows to steal it  
from you!

So that's what this was about?

This bastard thinks he can take on the power of three Alphas contained within me?

Despite the pain, I grin up at him.

"You just signed your own death warrant."

He looks taken aback for a second.

But a second is all he gets, because there's a growl in the darkness, and then a huge wolf comes streaking out of the shadows, leaping up and hitting the guy straight in the chest, taking him to the ground.

Two other wolves follow, and then the guy is screaming as he's being torn to pieces.

Hands grab at me, and William's worried face is the last thing I see before the pain gets too much and everything goes woozy as shift violently, the silver bullets and wolfsbane pumping through my system making it more painful than it's ever been before.

I pass out to the sound of my enemy's last gurgling scream before his life is snatched from him. Chapter 170

I wake up in the huge king-sized bed of the Rathborn apartment in the Roberts Corp building, and I'm immediately assaulted with the scent of my mate's arousal all over the sheets.

Sonofabitch

I'm instantly hard, despite how shitty I feel.

I roll out of bed, frustrated from both getting jumped and almost killed last night, and infuriated at the lust surging hard through my system from the simple fading scent of my aroused mate in the blankets. I stagger into the bathroom and get the shower running from multiple jets, even more annoyed at myself as I remember how I modeled this bathroom and the shower in particular after the one at the hotel, where Leah had put on an erotic, decadent display for me, and I'd nearly lost it. Almost smashed my way into that shower and claimed her as my mate right then and there.

I wonder now, if I had given into those base, animal instincts that night, would things have turned out the way they had?

In the shower, I jerk myself off, mostly in anger and frustration, but it doesn't do anything to make me feel any better.

I'd never considered coming to California dangerous before last night.

Who the hell had thought they could kill me and steal my Alpha abilities like that?

Had it just been some random rogue wolf?

Or was it the same person-or people-who'd been trying to kill me for months now, starting way back when Leah had still been in the hospital and I'd narrowly escaped that first attack.

It's part of the reason I can't be around Leah-my mate-besides all the hurt and anger between us.

The idea that my mate could get caught in the crosshairs-or worse, used against me-makes both me and my wolf feel the sort of unhinged that is a slippery slope into completely losing control.

It's bad enough trying to keep myself and my wolf in check because we're staying away from our mate.

My temper has been hair-trigger. I'm more volatile and restless without my mate nearby.

I vowed I would never let this happen to me in my life.

Not after seeing what it did to my father when my mother was killed.

It was why I was never going to mate anyone.

But Leah...

I don't even know when exactly she got under my skin.  
But now I don't know how to live without her, even if we have to live apart.  
I'm better off living in the remote cabin now.  
Hard for anyone to sneak up on me out there, where I can hear or scent them coming for miles. What I don't sense, the surveillance does. It's state of the art.  
I need to get to the bottom of who is out to get me, before they manage to get lucky and actually take me out.  
I have a strong suspicion it's someone on the Council, either an official plot to get rid of me, or someone unsanctioned and acting alone, I'm not sure.  
I know the Elders on the Council are uneasy about me possessing three packs, even though I've reassured them I have no designs on any Council seats,  
That's not what I want right now in my life.  
All that petty in-fighting and shifting power struggles and overseeing peace between packs and solving issues wolves are either too dumb or too stubborn to fix themselves?  
Yeah, no thanks.  
All I want to do is get my revenge on those Old Country Wolves who dared help that bastard Liam, but getting to the bottom of who is trying to kill me is going to have to take priority.  
Oh, and that damned mess with the missing Roberts Corp AI weapons systems that was meant to go to the military for billions of dollars.  
I feel like crap, but I don't have time to be sick today, even if those damned silver-wolfsbane bullets nearly killed me last night.  
And here's the kicker on that... I can't allow myself to die.  
If I die... Leah does too.  
Maybe I can't be with Leah, and maybe she hates me right now, but the truth is, everything I'm doing and everything I'll do for the rest of my life will always come back to her.  
I only hope one day she'll understand.  
And forgive me for my sins.