

Bad Love 181

Chapter 181

I get a split second to hear answering howls in the distance-Roberts pack members and the few guys I brought with me from the Rathbom pack-before the enemy wolves descend in a rush of snarling, glowing eyes and bared teeth.

I'm smaller than them, but I quickly realize I'm also faster.

I dodge snapping teeth and raking claws, but there's too many of them, and eventually I have to fight.

I go low, clamping my jaws around a leg and biting down until I feel bones breaking. I lunge at another and bite its underbelly. But they're circling and the next wave, I'm forced to defend more than attack because they are coming at me three at a time.

I bite and slash, kicking out and clawing.

My limbs are an endless fury of motion, slashing and tearing, never stopping lest they get a hold of me, and by sheer numbers, I'll

be overcome.

I'm in survival mode, thinking of nothing except doing whatever it takes to stay alive.

I hear a vicious growl, and another wolf comes streaking out of the woods.

At first, I think even more enemy wolves are attacking, but this new wolf I don't recognize-huge, silver, with darker fur around his muzzle and ears-begins attacking the wolves who are trying to hurt me.

He's vicious and relentless, tearing through the other wolves at inhuman speed, and for the first time I think I might actually survive this.

A wolf snaps at me, catching me on the shoulder and I can't help but yelp.

The silver wolf-face and chest now covered in dark crimson blood-lunges toward me and savages the wolf that had sun

into me.

In another few moments, the wolves who aren't already dead seem to finally get a hint that they're outmatched, and turn tail, fleeing into the woods.

Almost as soon as they're gone, I shift back, panting, feeling nauseous at the blood spattered all over me.

At how close I came to being killed on my own family's land.

In the distance, I can hear the howls of the Roberts and Rathborn wolves getting closer.

They'll be here within moments, but if not for the silver wolf, they would have been too late.

I would have already been dead.

A few seconds later, the silver wolf shifts as well, and the man straightens, covered in even more blood than I am.

He turns to face me, and my heart drops into my feet.

I can't believe it.

"What are you doing here?"

Chapter 182

Ryker smiles at me, the expression amused and victorious.

He obviously enjoyed slaughtering his way through those unknown wolves, and no doubt he now thinks I owe him.

Except all I can think about is the last night I saw him.

The night he helped Liam betray me.

Some of the fury I've been keeping bottled up since I woke up and realized the extent of my loss comes screaming up within me in a rush of heated anger.

Before I know it, I've partially shifted and lunged at him in a blind rage.

I collide into him and we go down to the forest floor, but as I go to slash my claws through his flesh, he reaches up and catches my wrists.

"So feisty! I knew you had the soul of a warrior, but not many Alphas would dare attack me."

He's not offended or pissed off. All I've managed to do is entertain him, which makes me even angrier.

"Do you have any idea what you cost me that night?" I snarl at him.

At this, the smile slips from his face and he nods.

"I'm sorry for your loss, Luna. If I could go back and change things, I would."

The howls of the Roberts and Rathborn wolves are closing in, almost upon us, and I give half a thought to tying him up in a basement and not letting him go until I feel better about what happened that night.

Which will be never.

However, he rolls suddenly, putting me underneath him.

"What are you doing here?" I ask him again, less heat to my words this time.

I let my emotions get the better of me and foolishly attacked a dangerous, Old Country Wolf. He could have easily killed me if he'd wanted.

He leans down, and my heart skips in wild panic-and maybe something else-as for a second I think he's going to kiss me.

"I'm here for you, Leah. That's all you need to know right now."

With that, he rolls off me, and by the time I glance over, he's shifting back into wolf form and streaking off into the forest.

I sit up just as a huge group of wolves burst into the clearing.

James immediately shifts and comes sprinting over to me,

Adam not far behind.

"Leah, are you okay?!" James demands as he drops down next to me, large hands landing on my shoulder as his panicked

gaze tracks over me. "Where are you hurt?"

"Most of it is not my blood," I tell him in a thick voice, feeling a bit faint after everything that happened. Maybe Adam was right, damn him, and I'm pushing myself too hard.

"But I did get bit on my shoulder," I continue, the sting of it making itself known.

Adam leans around me to have a closer look.

"It's already healing," he confirms. "But we should get your back to the house so we can check you over properly."

A few of the other guys have shifted, and they're glancing between me and all the dead wolves that are easily twice my size. They're staring at me in awe and whispering among themselves.

James seems to pick up on it, and then glances around, as if he's been so focused on me before now, he didn't even notice the carnage.

"Leah," he says in a strangled voice. "How the hell did you survive?"

"I don't know," I tell him honestly, as he and Adam help me to my feet.

James' nostrils flare and for a second I wonder if he can scent Ryker. However, if he does, he doesn't say anything.

Meanwhile, I don't volunteer the information. I don't think

James would be happy to learn about Ryker, especially

considering the way James had reacted to Tobin, and Ryker is arguably much worse.

Besides, what Ryker said to me, I need to figure out what he meant by it.

I'm here for you, Leah.

Chapter 183

We all shift and run back to the Roberts mansion.

don't fail to notice how James and Adam keep me between them, and the rest of the wolves surround us in a loose, protective circle.

They know I can fend for myself-I have just proven that by simply surviving an attack that would have killed most other

wolves, even if I didn't do it on my own as they believe-this is more a show of respect.

More and more, I am learning how it feels to be treated as the Luna I'd always wanted to be.

Once we arrive back, Adam insists I go straight to the medical annex for a full checkup, giving me some scrubs to put on while he scans, tests, pokes and prods me until he declares I am healthy, but probably need to rest more.

I refuse, even though I know he's right.

go into the house and up to the bedroom I used while I stayed here as Alpha, then have a shower to finally wash off all the blood and grime.

When I come out of the bathroom to dress, I find James sitting on my bed like he has every right to be

there.

Unbidden, I remember how he looks with no clothes-knowing how everyone looks naked is a fact of life, being a wolf-and

for a guilty second, I wonder what it would be like if he f u c ked me right now on that bed.

Would he make me scream like Aaron could?

I shake my head in frustration at myself, and my wolf is internally growling at me.

It's not James we want, it's Aaron.

No matter how many times I tell myself he's hurt me too much. and I can't forgive him, the truth is I miss him like crazy.

I just want to feel his arms around me. To be held by him and believe everything will eventually be okay.

There is no substitute for him.

And f u c king his beta would be cruel-to all parties.

That longing is an ache I want to soothe, and I'm getting

so twisted up over it, other options are beginning to look appealing. I know with James it won't be what I ultimately

want, but at least it might take the edge off.

"Did you need something?" I ask James, my voice a little short

as I head over to the closet to find myself some clothes.

got a message from Aaron," James says, and my guilt for even thinking about taking comfort from James-even in an

abstract way I know I will never go through with-makes me feel even worse.

"Oh, so he's decided we're worth talking to, has he?" I snipe in b itchy frustration.

James ignores my attitude.

Probably because he's well used to it by now.

"The Council has called a special meeting. Aaron wants to make sure you're going to be there. He's also instructed me to bring you to the Council Hall early. Something about a project problem that needs taking care of."

Has Aaron already found out something about the AI weapons system, and he's planning to tell me in person?

I wouldn't be surprised.

He's always had ways of getting information that seemed amazing and mysterious to me.

I try to ignore the sting that he's requested to see me in a public building, probably with James in attendance because Aaron otherwise refuses to be alone with me.

I wonder what the Council meeting could be about, and try not to worry.

It's unusual for them to call another so soon. I'll have to check my email to see if it says anything about the reason.

I suppose I can't be surprised.

So much has happened, and the power balance between the packs has shifted dramatically.

A lot of it in Aaron's favor.

I think of Tobin and Ryker lurking around, and the fact that

I just narrowly survived a brazen attack on my own family's

lands.

Who could have been behind it?

Was it to do with the missing AI tech, someone trying to get me out of the way because I know about it and could cause trouble for them?

Or did my father and brother do something else I'm not aware of, and as the last surviving Roberts wolf, someone has

decided to take their revenge out on me?

Or does it have something to do with Aaron, and the fact I'm Luna to his Alpha of three packs?

At this point, it could be any number of things.

Enemies are coming for me.

And right now, I can't see where they're coming from

Chapter 184

AARON

I don't like being personally summoned to the Council meeting at the best of times, let alone when I'm sure someone on the Council is trying to kill me.

Not that these kinds of summons have happened frequently in the past. I've never done anything to cause trouble with the Council, attending previous meetings was usually just a formality.

But this Council Meeting hasn't fallen on a regular date, it's a special session.

The fact that I've been personally directed to attend can't be a good sign.

I sent a message to James-not trusting myself to talk with Leah directly-instructing him to make sure Leah attends, and to bring her at least a few hours early.

We need to get to the bottom of this AI weapons thing, and even though I think we're better off apart because that way,

she's safer, there's no arguing that Leah and I work well as a team.

If we can put this matter of the missing AI tech to rest, then after, we won't have much reason to have direct contact.

Safer for Leah, at least.

The idea that someone might kill Leah in an attempt to hurt or even kill me through our mating bond is both terrifying and infuriating.

Maybe one day in the future when I've neutralized the threat, the two of us will have healed enough to consider reconciling, but right now, this is the way it has to be.

I will protect her, even if it means sacrificing my own sanity.

As long as she's alive and safe somewhere in the world, that's the most important thing.

My inner wolf is impatient to leave and see our mate as I shower and dress.

Telling him to calm the hell down-that nothing is going to happen between us-does absolutely nothing to dampen his enthusiasm.

Once I'm ready to leave, I go to tell Lillian goodbye, where she's sitting in the quiet serenity of the bedroom, and I wish I could stay in that room so badly, it's a physical ache in my chest.

But I shake off the longing and head out, driving myself to the Council Meeting Hall with half a contingent of my guys, while the other half stay back to protect the cabin.

arrive at the Council Meeting Hall and park out back in the mostly empty lot, sending a message to James instructing him to do the same.

Then it's a matter of waiting, and I'm a live wire of anticipation, frustration and impatience.

Eventually, a small convoy of Rathborn SUVs roll into the lot, and I subtly tug my jacket straight, even though I know I look impeccable.

I remain standing by the back of my SUV as James gets out, cutting me a barely civil look, before going around to open the door for Leah.

And then she's emerging and I'm frozen to the spot as I take her in.

She's wearing a long, slinky red dress, the material clinging and flowing over her curves like water, barely leaving anything to the imagination. She's not wearing a bra, that's obvious in the way her nipples are pebbled and peaking beneath the material, as if begging for attention from my mouth.

I wonder if she's wearing panties, and the heat that storms through me almost sends me to my knees right there for everyone to see.

My mate is gorgeous, sexy, delectable beyond words.

I love her more than I thought it possible to ever love someone.

My pulse is pounding.

My blood is rushing hard and hot through my body.

My wolf is practically panting for his mate.

I'm half-hard.

I want to confess everything to her, if only she'll tell me she loves me back.

And I have no idea how I'm going to get through the next few hours and keep my sanity intact.

Chapter 185

LEAH

My legs are weak as I walk toward Aaron.

God, I miss him.

thought my feelings for him before were strong.

But now that I have my wolf, now that we're mated, the emotions that storm through me-love, so bright and pure it

hurts-makes anything I felt in the past pale in comparison.

He's wearing a perfectly tailored three-piece suit, molded to the muscles of his body like he just stepped off a GQ cover.

I can't ever remember him looking so good.

I can't ever remember wanting him this much.

Part of me has always wanted Aaron.

At first, I wanted his approval in childish innocence.

Later as a moody teenager, I would do almost anything to get his attention, good or bad.

Then, he introduced me to the pleasures to be found between a man and a woman, and I'd play games of teasing and seduction.

Now, in this moment, I want him in a way that eclipses anything else that ever came before it.

This isn't simple lust.

This is a tidal pull on a cellular level, the same way the moon drags the oceans to its whims.

This is the kind of love they write songs and make movies about. A once-in-a-lifetime fairytale kind of love.

But how can it hurt so much at the same time?

His eyes subtly glow as I get closer, and I can sense he's not as immune as he'd like me to believe.

However, his gaze eventually cuts away from me to focus on James, who followed me over.

"Beta. How have things been?" Aaron asks James instead of addressing me directly, which is just infuriating.

"Interesting," James replies, and I feel him move closer and angle his body toward mine.

The action is mostly innocent and protective, but we all know it's almost verging on a claim, and Aaron immediately starts bristling, even as James puts his shoulders back like he's hoping Aaron will start something.

Standing between these two powerful males is a heady thrill, but I can't have them fighting over me.

"Why am I here, Aaron?" I ask in an impatient voice, bringing his attention back to me.

"We have a problem to solve, remember?" Aaron says arrogantly.

He wraps his fingers around my elbow and tugs me forward-pointedly away from James-and the heat of his fingers is a sensual shock to my system.

"You and the rest of the guys set up a perimeter," Aaron tells James. "I'll call you if I need anything."

"Is that okay with you, Luna?" James stubbornly asks, making Aaron growl.

"You answer to me, not her," Aaron snarls.

"You ordered me to protect her with my life, which I've done," James replies, his features drawing into a dark glare. "By your own admission, yes, in fact, I do answer to her."

"Know your place!" Aaron snaps back in response.

James cuts his gaze to mine, something heated and intimate in his eyes.

I know he's doing it just to piss off Aaron—a dangerous ploy, for sure—but it still makes my cheeks get warm and undoubtedly go bright red.

"Oh yeah," James drawls. "I definitely know my place."

Before Aaron can respond—or hit him—James turns and signals to the other guys, moving off to set up the security Aaron ordered.

This time when Aaron tugs on my arm, it's far less gentle, his grip now almost bruising.

He drags me toward the building, and as soon as we're inside, he's got me shoved up against the wall, his powerful body

pressing into me everywhere making my senses go haywire.

"What the hell is going on between you and my Beta?"

Chapter 186

"What do you mean?" I demand in reply, even though I know exactly what he's asking.

"Don't play dumb, Leah," Aaron growls, pressing his hips more firmly against mine, and I can feel he's hard as stone.

It makes a wave of sharp arousal wash through me, and I try not to squirm as I feel myself getting wet.

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"Have you been fucking James?" Aaron demands in a low, furious voice.

That's when I realize I can scent something—someone—unfamiliar on him.

It's all over him, in fact, and there's only one way it could've gotten there.

And he's accusing me of fucking James?

He's a bastard, and a hypocrite, and suddenly I'm the one infuriated.

I put all of my newly discovered wolf strength into shoving him off me, and I immediately see he's surprised—and even more turned on—that I'm fighting back.

"So what if I am?" I demand, almost yelling. "You walked out on me, Aaron. Don't forget that. And no one will tell me anything about where you're living or what's taking up all your time that you have to manage the packs and business remotely. So what is it, Aaron? Or should I ask who is it? Who can I scent on you like you've been all over each other?"

Aaron looks no less infuriated, but he cuts his gaze away from me in guilt.

I didn't think I had any heart left to break after all I've been through—especially losing our baby—but in that moment I'm proven wrong as my heart shatters all over again.

Except it's worse this time, because we're mated, and my wolf feels it too.

She maybe feels it even more acutely than I do.

And she's infuriated.

I spin away from him, angry tears pricking my eyes, but I

refuse to let him see them fall.

“Where are you going?” Aaron demands, like he still has any right to know.

“Away from you,” I snap b

Chapter 187

For a while I’m so angry and hurt, I stalk the empty corridors of the Council Meeting Hall without any real direction in mind.

I want to lash out.

I want to shift and run.

need an outlet for all this pain both myself and my wolf are feeling, but I know I’m not going to find that anywhere here.

The way I love him feels like a curse right now.

I go into the bathroom and splash some cold water on my face, then check myself in the mirror.

know I look amazing in this dress, flaunting the outline of my breasts and flare of my hips.

Much like Aaron, James hadn’t bothered to hide his hunger when I’d walked down the stairs back at the Rathborn mansion and he’d first seen me.

Vindictively, I think maybe I should go and f u ck James.

Right now, while I’m wild with fury and unstated lust.

Find him wherever he’s patrolling the
and let him pin me up against a tree while his hips piston into me.

Or drag James into the backseat of Aaron’s SUV and climb on top so I can ride him until I come and leave the scent of sex as a parting gift for my jerk of a mate when he gets back into his car later.

But I know it will leave me empty, because Aaron is the one I really want, the one I love beyond all reason and hope.

And by hurting Aaron, I’ll really only end up hurting myself through our mating bond.

And that’s the source of most of my anger.

Eventually, I calm down enough to leave the bathroom, and when I emerge, I realize I’ve wandered into the wing of the building where the Councilmember offices are.

There’s still basically no one around apart from a few harried looking admin staff who no doubt have their hands full preparing for tonight’s meeting and don’t pay me any mind.

I think back to Tobin and whatever he had going on with my brother.

Was that what he wanted to talk about when he’d asked me to come here early?

Maybe I don’t need Aaron to figure this out for me after all.

I decide to check Tobin’s office.

What if I can find some kind of information about what he and Liam were up to?

Or better yet, information about the AI weapons system itself.

I walk down the hall, finding the doors have plaques with each member of the Council inscribed on it.

When I see Tobin's door, I hurry up and ease it open, glad to find it isn't locked.

Inside is decorated with antiques, yet has stylishly masculine tones, and I'm a little surprised that Tobin has such a finely appointed office given his wild nature and he himself admitted he spends a lot of time as a wolf daily.

But, it's possible all the offices look like this, and it's not really a

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Was Aaron also aware they were maybe friends or working together?

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admitted he spends a lot of time as a wolf daily.

But, it's possible all the offices look like this, and it's not really a reflection of Tobin at all.

I start at the desk, opening draws and flipping through folders, but nothing is jumping out right away.

Probably anything worth knowing is on the computer.

I'm just reaching out to turn it on when the door swings open

Chapter 188

Tobin walks casually into the room, not seeming surprised to see me here.

My mind scrambles to come up with an excuse as I move away from the desk.

"Luna Leah," he greets, moving to intercept my path, blocking me from a direct escape to the door. "To what do I owe this visit?"

"You don't seem surprised to see me," I comment, stalling for time.

Tobin gives a lazy shrug, but his pale eyes are sharp as ever. "Because I scented you long before I stepped into my office.

Fury and lust. Quite the combination."

I feel my face getting hot, and Tobin grins, clearly enjoying how he's flustered me.

"I'd be flattered to think you're all twisted up over me, but I'm sure it's that Alpha mate of yours who really gets to take the credit," Tobin continues. "So tell me, Leah, why are you in my office?"

"You were at the Roberts mansion a few times died. It seemed like you were friends with Liam. I didn't know who else to talk to, because I think there were things they were keeping from me, and I'm beginning to think those things didn't go away just because my father and my brother are dead."

Tobin crosses his arms and regards me with faint amusement, like I'm a chess piece and he's debating where to move me next.

I don't like it one bit.

Between James's warning and my wolf bristling, I feel like even standing in the same room as this unpredictable wolf is dangerous.

Tobin, however, moves closer, crowding me toward the desk until the edge presses into the backs of my thighs.

"Of course Liam and your father had secrets you didn't know about," Tobin says, his voice almost chiding, as if I should have realized and accepted this fact on my own instead of questioning it. "But you have to ask yourself, Leah, do you really want to know what those secrets are? What if knowing them changes everything you thought you knew about your family?"

I tilt my chin up defiantly.

"You might be surprised what I already know about," I try to keep my voice light, playing along with Tobin, hoping this will get me what I need. "You know what they say-knowledge is power."

"So it's power you're after, Luna?" Tobin leans in closer, bracing a hand against the edge of the desk, angling his body toward mine. I don't like the feel of being crowded by him, but I remain where I am for the moment.

"Isn't everyone?" I ask coyly.

Tobin's eyes glow, and I resist the urge to shift back or show any weakness.

"Leah, you have no idea about the power you already possess..."

Chapter 189

AARON

I take some time to calm down, but rage at the idea of my Beta fucking my mate keeps my temper on a constant simmer. I search for Leah for a while, but don't find her, and wonder if she went running to James.

That thought only makes me want to shred James with my claws next time I see him, but some distant part of me-maybe my wolf-reminds me that I don't know for sure that Leah and James are sleeping together, so I need to pull myself back before I do something I'll regret. On an even deeper level, I trust

James like a brother, and though he might goad me or try to force my hand, I can't see him following through with fucking my wife.

He's too honest and honorable for something like that.

My wolf makes some rumbling noise of agreement in my head. And when my wolf is being the voice of reason between

us, then I know I'm screwed.

For the sake of my sanity, I try to put Leah and the fight from my mind and go searching for Tobin's office instead. It's part

of the reason I wanted to come early.

I get the feeling that it's possible Tobin is mixed up

attempts to kill me, and the dangerous missing AI tech, and I aim to search his office to find proof.

However, when I reach the hall outside Tobin's office, the first thing I scent is Leah.

Passion is rolling off her in waves, and I think right now she's like ambrosia walking to any red-blooded wolf who scents

her.

However, then I hear the low tones of Tobin's voice, speaking seductively, and my mate answering in light teasing tones.

So Leah didn't run to James, she ran to Tobin instead?

What. the. Fuck.

Is this how she plans to get back at me for the slights she perceives that I've transgressed against her?

Have sex with every single wolf she knows will enrage me the most?

I step forward and fling open the door, making it crash into the wall.

Tobin casually straightens from where he has Leah pinned up against the desk.

I growl, my fangs and claws emerging in fury.

Tobin, however, simply grins, as if my rage is amusing.

"Did you lose track of your mate, Alpha?" Tobin taunts, shoving his hands into his pockets and strolling toward me. "Maybe you should keep her on a tighter leash, or some other Alphas might start thinking she's easy-and delicious-pickings."

I want to attack Tobin so badly, sweat breaks out over my skin.

But to attack Tobin is to attack the Council, especially right here in the Council offices.

And I have too much to lose to make some hot-headed, foolish choice like that.

Tobin brushes by me and leaves the room, not bothering to close the door behind him.

My gaze zeros in on my mate where she's still leaning provocatively against the edge of the edge of the desk.

I couldn't demand anything of Tobin.

But by god, my mate will answer for this.

Chapter 190

"So which is it, Leah?" I demand furiously, stalking forward. "James or Tobin? Or maybe both? Anyone

but me, is that right?"

Her eyes narrow and her wolf flashes in her gaze.

"What are you talking about?"

There's a hint of warning in her tone, like she knows exactly what I'm saying, and she's telling me not to go there.

I lunge and grab her up, splaying her across the desk.

"You know exactly what I'm talking about," I tell her in a growl, and the scent of her arousal hits my system like a drug.

No matter who else she might give herself to, she can't deny the simple idea of me turns her on like nothing else.

She tenses, and I wonder if she's going to fight back. Shove me off her like she did in the hallway.

I wasn't expecting it then. Leah's never been very physically aggressive with me before, and she never had her wolf

anyway, so even if she'd wanted to, she couldn't have countered my strength.

Now however...

Now she has her wolf, and that wolf is fierce and feisty, a perfect match for my own stubborn beast.

I want my mate with a desperation that borders on insanity, but at the same time I'm fighting it every inch of the way, because I think if I let myself slip even a little, I won't be able to keep walking away from her, and that could prove dangerous

for both of us.

"Tobin can't be trusted," I tell her when she remains obtusely silent. "He'll chew you up and spit you out. If you think you can toy with him, then you're more foolish than I ever took you for."

Leah rears up and plunges her fingers into my hair, gripping to the point it stings, but it leaves my inner wolf purring.

"Does it make you crazy, Aaron?" she taunts, eyes flashing. "Do you imagine me getting wet for them, do you think about

how I scream when they pin me down and rut into me?"

I reach down and clamp my hands around the edge of the desk, feeling the wood splinter beneath my fingers.

Because yes, it does making me fucking crazy, thinking about it, hearing her say that.

Leah is mine.

And it's time she was reminded of that.