

Bad Love 241

Chapter 241

Aaron drags me back down to the soft rug in front of the fire, stripping clothes from my body faster than I can keep track of

Between his deep, drugging kisses and the way his hands are thoroughly yet gently working my body into a frenzy, I am completely overwhelmed.

But in the best way possible.

Aaron murmurs words of praise and love against my skin, exploring me like we've never done this before, like it's all brand new and we're just discovering each other for the first time.

And maybe in a way we are.

We're in an entirely new chapter of our life, after all.

Plus, in so many ways, I feel like I've been reborn over and over.

The person I've become now is so different to the woman I was a year ago.

I'm a mother now.

I have my wolf.

I'm an Alpha again.

And I'm mated with Aaron in a way I spent countless nights dreaming about in the darker days of our marriage when I wondered over and over if I was even worth anything at all.

Questioned what the point of my existence even was, if I was nothing more than an empty sacrifice to maintain peace needed for a war that I wasn't even a part of

But now I think I can see how all that led me here.

How maybe I needed to go through the hard times-the terrible times when all hope seemed lost-to truly appreciate what I have here and now with Aaron.

My thoughts soon scatter as Aaron intensifies his sensual assault on my body.

By the time he pushes my legs wide and begins to slide into me, I'm wet and achy with need.

Aaron plunges himself deep inside me, and I swear I feel it down to my very soul.

I can't help but cry out, which only spurs Aaron on harder and faster

He owns me, every part of me, body and heart.

Things have always been intense between us, but now it's like there's this extra layer of pleasure washing back and forth between us, like somehow, I can feel his ecstasy as well as my own, and vice versa.

And layered over all that again is our love, which just makes everything even more acute.

It's like I almost can't stand it.

Like it's too much.

But at the same time, if I don't get more if Aaron doesn't complete me the way I know only he can then I might die from wanting.

However, these feelings can't last forever, not with the way they're building and building.

Just as I can feel myself about to go over the edge, my wolf suddenly grabs some of my control.

My fangs slip out and I yank Aaron down, biting into his neck-the same place an Alpha usually bites his mate to claim her just as pleasure explodes through me..

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Aaron shouts, and I feel his climax reverberating through me.

It's so strong and intense, I can't tell where my pleasure ends and his begins.

For a long moment after, both of us are frozen, panting, coming down from a high so extreme I have no

idea how we didn't crash and burn.

Eventually, Aaron rolls off me and collapses at my side on the rug.

"What the hell, Leah," he says with a disbelieving laugh.

"What?" I ask, feeling a little bashful now that it's all over.

I don't know what happened, just that my wolf took over right at the critical moment and I was acting on instinct alone.

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You claimed me," Aaron says. "Like a real Alpha."

"I am a real Alpha," I tell him, poking him in the shoulder. "And anyway, so what? We were already mated, so what would it even do?"

"I don't know," Aaron replies thoughtfully, rubbing the middle of his chest. "I've never heard of two Alphas being mated both ways before. I don't even know if that's possible. But... I think I feel more connected to you."

Aaron glances at me, a question in his expression and I nod shyly

"I feel more connected to you as well, but I didn't know if that was just the mating bond we already have, or because I love you so much."

Aaron smiles, and then leans in to kiss me. "I love you, too."

I feel like I need to pinch myself.

I never thought Aaron would so easily say he loved me, or that he would say it so often.

"And while I wish we could stay here like this forever, just you, me and Ethan, we can't ignore the world forever. Not while there's still some unknown threat out there."

"You don't think this all ends, now that Adam and Tobin are both dead?" I ask, even though I know myself things aren't that easy.

"Someone else on the Council was helping Tobin," Aaron replies "Maybe more than one person. Last night was probably just the beginning"

"The beginning of what?" I ask with trepidation.

"The beginning of a new pack war."

Chapter 242

AARON

I hate to have to break Leah out of the spell. Pull her from the warm glow of love we just shared, especially after spending precious time as a family, and seeing her get to be with our son for the first time.

But the rest of the world won't wait.

I'm sure that as soon as the Council sorts out the mess of what happened with Tobin, Adam, and the end result of Leah becoming the Alpha of the Havelock pack, then the Council will be on our doorstep, demanding justice.

That's why I sent James out last night to several local packs, discreetly feeling out who are my allies, and who is planning to stand against me. Tve also contacted the wolves within the Council who owe me favors, but so far, none of them have gotten back to me.

I'm trying not to think that's a bad sign.

Part of me thinks I should simply go and hand myself over to the Council right this minute so I can protect Leah from the fallout

However, if I really thought doing that would be better in the long run for both Leah and Ethan, I would

already be gone.

But the Council is known to be ruthless when upholding the laws to safeguard the packs and manage the integrity of our species

They aren't likely to simply let Leah go without at least facing some kind of hearing, even if I do hand myself over in return for a promise to leave her out of things.

Anyway, I know Leah would never accept me doing such a thing.

Both Leah and her wolf love fiercely, with all that they are, and I've got no doubt Leah would pick a losing fight with the entire Council if she honestly thought she had a chance of saving me.

Plus, there's the not so small problem of whoever's been helping Tobin still embedded within the Council.

I'm not naïve enough to believe Tobin's plans will die with him.

I know he told Leah something about the AI tech being gone the night Liam was killed, but I don't buy it.

Plus, from what little information I could glean from my own snooping, Tobin was the only one who could have so successfully taken everything and continued the project while Leah was in a coma for all those months

Anyway, it was no secret that Liam and Tobin were friends, and that included doing all kinds of business together. Frankly I would be surprised to learn that Tobin didn't know about the AI tech.

"You don't really think this will start a new pack war, do you?" Leah asks, sitting up and then wrapping her arms around her knees, as if she's cold.

I go over to the nearby couch to grab a soft throw blanket, and then wrap it around her shoulders.

"I wish I could tell you differently, Leah, but we need to be realistic about what we're facing. I signed a legally binding document stating I wouldn't take action against the Council or any of its individual members."

"But that's not fair!" Leah protests "Tobin tried to kill you. It was self-defense. And then Adam took our son and also wanted to kill you Surely the Council will take that into account-

"I'd like to believe so, but we can't be sure who in the Council might have been helping Tobin, and how much sway they might have over the rest of the Council. All that aside, the Council in general have never been fans of mine. Since I gained the power of three Alphas, that's truer than ever. They're probably going to use this to finally take me down a peg or two."

Leah shakes her head, gaze worried. "We can't just sit here and wait for the Council to make its move.

We should leave. Right now, Take Ethan and get as far away from here as possible until we can figure out who took the AI tech, who else was helping Tobin, and prove you didn't kill him.

I have to admit, the idea is tempting

Just leave everything behind, take my mate and my son somewhere I know we'll be safe and live a quiet life without all of these outside

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forces trying to tear our lives apart.

But I can't simply dismiss or forget all the people who rely on us for protection and their livelihoods. The packs and the businesses, those aren't simple things to walk away from.

Besides, if we run, then we'll have to run forever.

For the Council it would be as good as admitting our guilt with a signed confession.

They will never stop coming for us.

And we will never know peace, and never stop looking over our shoulders.

Neither me nor Leah are wired that way.

We don't run from our problems. We face them head on and fight.

And I know today isn't going to be any different.

I reach up and gently cup Leah's face in my hands.

"I don't think that's what you really want. I think we both know we wouldn't be able to live with ourselves if we just walked away from our responsibilities-from our families heritages-disregarding all the people who are relying on us.

Leah sighs and drops her gaze. "You're right. I would never feel right about things if we just gave up and ran. But now that we've got Ethan to consider, part of me wants to do exactly that, if only to keep him safe, and keep us all together."

"I can understand that sentiment," I reply quietly, thinking about all the extremes I've taken to keep Leah and Ethan safe recently

Leah looks up at me, love and trust in her gaze. "What do we do now, Aaron?"

"Now, we prepare for war.

Chapter 243

LEAH

Aaron's blunt words make my blood run cold.

Is this really happening?

Half of my childhood was sacrificed to prevent more war.

Now it looks as if an entirely new war is about to begin.

One that pits us against the very Council itself.

Part of me is terrified.

How can we take on the Council who rule all the packs, and expect to win?

Are we crazy for doing this?

But then, knowing everything we know, and considering the way Tobin came after Aaron, and someone attacked the hospital NICU with the express purpose of killing my infant son, how can we not do this?

Even if we didn't fight, it's obvious that whoever was helping Tobin won't stop coming for us.

It seems they won't be happy until Aaron is dead.

Maybe even until all three of us-me, Ethan and Aaron-are dead, no matter that Ethan is innocent in all this.

It's painfully clear that elements within the Council have become corrupt, and we're no longer talking about the survival of ourselves, or even just wolves.

The entire world might be at stake, and even though us wolves mostly live separately from humans and they don't even know about our existence, that doesn't mean I want to see the entire human race wiped out simply so wolves can be free.

Before I can say anything to Aaron's startling announcement that we must prepare for war, James knocks on the door and hurries in without waiting for either myself or Aaron to reply.

When I see the look on his face, I immediately understand why.

Something is happening.

And whatever it is, it's not good.

In fact, it might be really bad.

"Beta, what's wrong?" Aaron asks, climbing to his feet.

"A contingent of Council SUVs have just arrived at the main gate," James reports. "Do we stand, or do we let them in?"

"How many?" Aaron asks as he throws on his clothes.

"Six cars," James replies.

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So possibly thirty men all up," Aaron muses. "They're on our pack land, walked right into our territory. We have the advantage, we could easily defeat thirty Council Enforcer wolves, even the highly trained ones."

My stomach erupts with nervous butterflies as Aaron glances at me.

"If we fight them, then we can't come back from that," I say to him. That is blatantly defying and attacking the very Council itself."

Aaron nods. "I know. Now isn't the time. We need to be smart about this."

He then turns to James "Tell the men to stand down. Let them pass.

Jamie's JOOKS Worked. The Rows now precarious our situation is. But he nods, always the loyal Beta.

"Yes, Alpha."

James leaves again, and Aaron turns to me as I quickly dress.

"Leah, whatever happens, just remember I love you."

My chest aches as I throw myself into his arms, wishing I didn't ever have to let him go.

"Don't talk like this is goodbye, Aaron. I know things are bad, but somehow, we'll get through this. We have to, for Ethan's sake."

Aaron nods and then kisses me, brief but intense.

After that, he pulls back, and it's like I can see his armor settling over him.

"Okay, let's go get this over with. We face them as a united front, together."

"Together," I agree.

For better or worse.

Chapter 244

Aaron and I make our way to the formal sitting room we use to entertain important guests.

We wait silently, and time seems to drag on forever.

Eventually there are voices and footsteps in the hall, and then James leads The Elder Samsen and The Elder Petyr into the room, two of the highest-ranking Council members.

I swallow down a surge of anxiety at their appearance here.

"Alpha Rathborn," Elder Samsen greets, his tone and features serious. I assume you know why we're here."

Aaron inclines his head. "Tobin is dead."

This bluntness seems to surprise Samsen and Petyr, because they share a quick look

"So you admit to killing Councilmember Tobin Havelock to assume his Alpha powers and control of his pack?"

"Adam killed Tobin!" I blurt out, and I sense Aaron stiffen next to me, obviously not wanting me to draw attention to myself

But it's too late. Both Samsen and Petyr swing their gazes to me.

And then it's like they're seeing me for the first time. Samsen subtly scents the air while Petyr's eyes narrow.

"Luna Leah, if Adam killed Tobin, how have you come to possess the powers of the Havelock Alpha?" Petyr demands in a sharp voice.

"Because I killed Adam," I reply defiantly, tilting my chin up.

I won't apologize for protecting my son and my mate.

"Adam took my son, Ethan, and planned to kill Aaron I did what I had to in order to keep the people I

love safe.”

Samsen and Petyr share another look, and I can't read them I can't tell if they believe me or not.

“We were led to believe the child had died. Was this some elaborate ruse?” Samsen says.

I feel Aaron bristle and know he's working to restrain his wolf.

“The attack at the hospital was real,” Aaron says, his voice low and growly. “My son barely survived. I let everyone believe he had died to protect him from further harm. A threat that came from within the Council itself.”

It's clear Samsen and Petyr don't buy this, and don't like the accusation Aaron is making.

“Where is your proof? Samsen demands. “And how do we know this all simply wasn't a conspiracy of your own design to gain more pack lands, more wolves, and amass more Alpha powers between you?”

That's when I realize I can sense a hint of unease radiating from the two Elders.

Oh my god.

They're intimidated by us.

They're worried about what we've done, and what we plan to do next.

It's probably not surprising

Aaron has the power of three Alphas, he's more powerful than any of the Councilmembers

And now I've come into Alpha powers again myself, even though it was completely accidental

Between us, we have the pack lands and wolves that account for over a third of all the packs in the entire area.

If we truly wanted to, we could change the very landscape of the entire pack hierarchy in Montana.

In that second, I realize it won't matter what we say or do

They've already made up their minds about us.

They think we're a danger to them personally, and everything the Council represents.

They won't stop until they've taken everything we have, or completely destroyed us.

I'm beginning to think we should have run while we had the chance.

“Why are you really here, Samsen?” Aaron asks impatiently, apparently not willing to play around any longer.

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“We're here to detain you for suspicion of conspiracy to murder a Councilmember. You will be held while the investigation takes place, and if it's proven that you premeditated and intentionally murdered Councilmember Tobin Havelock, you will face a Council trial and be punished accordingly,” Samsen replies arrogantly.

I wonder if he would be so haughty if he didn't have the rest of the Council standing behind him.

“This is ridiculous!” I say furiously, my temper getting the better of me “You can't detain Aaron. He hasn't done anything other than protect himself, me and our son from Tobin, who has been trying to kill him for months. Where was the Council and their investigations when that was happening? When the hospital was attacked and everyone thought Aaron's sole heir—a baby—had been killed? Why wasn't there any official investigation then?”

Aaron sets a hand on my arm, and I can feel him trying to send calming waves through our mating bond, but it's not going to work this time.

Not when the Council are about to take Aaron away and probably railroad him straight into a biased hearing that at the very least will strip him of his powers and bind his wolf, and at the very worst, execute him outright.

“Lama Leah,” Petyr says with a pinched expression, obviously not impressed with my outburst. “We’re not just here to detain Aaron.

At this, my blood runs cold.

“What do you mean?”

“You are in possession of the Havelock Alpha powers,” he replies, his eyes narrowing. “By order of the Council, Lana Leah, you are also to be detained.”

Chapter 245

AARON

“No!” I shout, stepping in front of Leah as if I can protect her from this “Leah had nothing to do with it. Our son needs his mother. You have no right to detain her as well!”

“Alpha Rathborn, you will conduct yourself in a calm manner, as befits your station,” Samsen says coldly. Meanwhile, Petyr is making some kind of call on his phone.

“F u c k you, Samsen,” I say crudely, making the Elder look even more unimpressed. “My wife is innocent in all this. So no, I’m not going to stand calmly by while you detain her. I’ll go with you for this farce of an investigation and trial, but you leave Leah out of it. You’ve got no proof she did anything wrong.”

Samsen arches an eyebrow and gives a cynical laugh. “No proof? She has Tobin’s Alpha powers. What other proof could we possibly need?”

Before I can answer, there’s a commotion in the hall outside the room.

James comes in, looking pissed as hell, because after him come twelve Council Enforcers,

I immediately growl and back up, taking Leah with me until we’re almost cornered. Which is definitely not ideal.

I know I could most likely rip through every wolf in this room and come out victorious.

Except then the Council wouldn’t just send out Enforcers to detain me

They’d send out a hit squad to put me down like a rabid dog

I knew the Council would come for me

I never imagined they’d come for Leah as well

I could make peace with the thought of whatever the Council had planned for me, as long as I knew Leah was safe.

But now that they want to take Leah as well, leaving our son defenseless?

Well, that’s a whole other story.

Samsen and Petyr motion for the Enforcers to hold back

“Is this really how you want things to end for you, Alpha Rathborn?” Petyr asks “Is it how you want things to end for your wife? Or your son?”

Da mn it.

They’ve got me by the balls, and they know it.

“You’re going to regret this, both of you,” I say, and the words aren’t much more than a snarl

Both Samsen and Petyr pale a little, though they try to cover it up with anger.

“Stand down, Alpha Rathborn!” Petyr yells, and I get some satisfaction out of that. I can tell he feels like he’s losing control of the situation

That right now, in this room, he isn’t the top Alpha.

I am

I slowly straighten and relax a fraction

I don’t need to show them how powerful I am.

They already know it.

“Fine, we’ll cooperate and go with you,” I say, but then I let my eyes glow menacingly with my wolf. “But know the only reason I’ll be sitting there in that cell is because I want to be. No bars-silver or otherwise-can keep me captive if I decide I want out.”

Samsen motions for the Enforcer wolves to restrain me, and it’s almost funny to watch them all waiting for someone else to do it, until Petyr finally grabs some poor guy and hauls him forward, then shoves him toward me.

I strut forward and hold out my hands compliantly.

The Enforcer edges forward and then quickly snaps silver cuffs around my wrist.

I hold his gaze as I lower my arms slightly, then twist my wrists, making the cuffs snap apart and drop to the floor like they were made. of flimsy plastic.

The Enforcer gulps audibly and jerks backward from me, as if he’s worried I’m going to snap him next.

Smart guy

“Alpha Rathborn!” Samsen snaps impatiently. “Enough of your games. You will cooperate!”

“No cuffs,” I drawl. “Not for me, and dam n sure not for my mate.”

“Very well,” Petyr says angrily. “But if you try anything else, you will be injected with a wolfsbane sedative. Do I make myself clear?”

“Crystal,” I say cuttingly, narrowing a gaze on him.”

If he comes near me with a wolfsbane sedative, I’m not the one who’ll be going lights-out.

I turn to Leah, who is staring at me with wide, apprehensive eyes

“We can’t leave Ethan. Lillian is dead, and he’s never been away from you for more than a few hours,” she says tears gathering at the edges of her lashes.

“I know, love,” I say, pulling her closer. “But James will guard Ethan with his life, and care for him like his own. I promise, I’ll get you out of this mess as quickly as I can.”

I’m already planning to call Ryker and also drag in every favor I’m owed by Old Country wolves and Councilmembers alike.

In that moment, I don’t care that we have an audience

I only have eyes for my mate, and I never imagined I could love anyone as much as I love her right now.

I’m going to fight tooth and nail to get us both out of this situation.

And then I’m going to make the Council wish they’d never been foolish enough to cross me.

Chapter 246

LEAH

Aaron leans down to kiss me one last time, and then Petyr starts yelling about keeping us apart and not letting us ‘conspire.’

It’s clear the two Elder Councilmembers and Enforcers are wary of Aaron and all that Alpha power he’s got flowing through his veins, but I’m obviously an easier target, so they step in and pull me away from him.

“Wait!” I say, imploring Samsen since he’s closer. “Please, let me say goodbye to my son.”

It’s so cruel

I’ve only just met Ethan.

I’ve been in the same house as him for less than a day.

And now they’re taking me away from him.

Luckily, Samsen agrees, and James hurries off to get Ethan.

While we’re waiting, the Enforcers march Aaron out of the room, and the last thing my mate says is

another vow that he's going to get me out of this
I believe him.

In more worried about Aaron not getting himself out of it, and what the hell I'm meant to do when my husband and mate is put up for some false trial and held to account for crimes he didn't even commit. James arrives with Ethan who is fussing and I wonder if James woke him up from a nap to bring him down here.

Then I feel terrible and wish I'd just left him be

It's not like he understands what's going on, and honestly that's probably a blessing right now.

And worse, he doesn't even know me.

I spent the first few weeks of his life in a coma, and then Aaron kept him a secret to save his life.

I'm so heartbroken, I don't even know which of my many hurts pain me the most.

"Goodbye, Ethan," I whisper, kissing the soft downy hair on his head,

He's got my curls, and I never even noticed until right that second.

It sends tears streaking down my cheeks.

I don't want to let him go, but I don't want someone else to force him from my hold when the Council take me away.

"Be a good boy for your Uncle James. Daddy and I will be home soon

I can barely see through my tears as I hand Ethan back to James, and my son starts crying harder, as if he can somehow understand what's going on around him after all

I dash the tears away and then turn to the two Elders.

"I'm ready," I say, and at least I'm somewhat doing this on my own terms.

Walking out under my own volition instead of the Enforcers dragging me out, kicking and screaming

At least this way I feel like I've got some sense of control, even if it's only an illusion.

Enforcers step in and surround me, walking in tandem to keep me boxed in as we leave the mansion.

2/2

I feel like a criminal, especially as we pass pack members who stare in confusion and distress. I want to be able to comfort or reassure them, but Samsen is walking ahead of me, and Petyr behind me, and I know they will interfere if I try to say or do anything. The pack members are innocent of all this.

Everything Aaron and I do, we do it to keep them safe.

Even if this time, we have to fight the very Council itself to ensure that safety.

When we get outside to the waiting convoy of Council SUVs I look for Aaron, but I don't see him. They've obviously already put him in a vehicle, and all the windows are tinted.

It's too much to hope they'll put us in the same vehicle, but when the Enforcers urge me into the back seat of an SUV, I'm still disappointed anyway not to find Aaron there waiting.

As the convoy of SUV's rolls away from the Rathborn mansion, I only have two desperate wishes.

One, that I soon come home and see my son again.

And two, I pray to go d that I haven't just said goodbye to my mate for the last time.

Chapter 247

AARON

It's been hours since the Enforcers marched me down to the basement of the Council building where they have silver-

barred cells they use for rogue wolves, and anyone else either being punished or awaiting punishment at the leisure of the Council.

In the cell across from me is a rogue wolf named Axel Sawyer.

He's an Alpha who blew in from Texas after reportedly slaughtering a whole bunch of wolves down South, including his own pack if rumors are to be believed. I'd heard the Council were hunting him, but I'd also heard he'd moved on to North Dakota.

That was months ago.

Have the Council been holding him this whole time?

I wonder why, but I'm not going to make conversation with a psychopath who slaughters his own pack, and I obviously have plenty of my own problems to occupy my mind.

Eventually, Samsen comes down and stands outside the bars to regard me like I'm some new exotic zoo animal.

"Where's my mate?" I bite out impatiently.

Because they certainly didn't bring her down to the cells, and I'm worried about what's happening to her.

Not knowing is making my wolf crazy.

It's bad enough that a wolf—a wild creature made to run free and wild—is held behind silver bars underground like this, purposefully depriving them of any natural light or air—but the added element of my mate possibly being in danger and not being able to help her is making my wolf harder to control

than usual.

If this goes on too long, there's every chance it'll make my wolf **so** crazed, I won't be able to restrain it anymore—even with all my considerable self-control—and I'll end up going rogue.

But maybe that's exactly what the Council wants.

It's way easier to condemn a rogue wolf than a powerful Alpha who is in full control of himself and his wolf.

"You're not in a position to demand anything," Samsen says coolly. "You will answer our questions regarding your role in the death of Alpha Tobin Havelock and they will inform the basis of your upcoming trial."

"I'm not answering anything **until** you **tell** me where my mate is." I step forward and wrap my hands around the bars.

For most wolves, that would create an instant burning reaction. For me, it's barely a tingle.

Just reminding Samsen that ultimately this cell won't hold me if I was suddenly no longer in control of my wolf.

“You’re playing a dangerous game, Samsen,” I growl at him. “You really want to find out what happens when you lose?”

Samsen is furious but takes a large step back. “When you decide to cooperate and answer our questions, Alpha Rathborn, then maybe you’ll learn what has become of your mate.”

With that, Samsen turns on his heel and marches away.

“So ya’ll are the wolf with the power of three Alphas I’ve heard so much about,” Axel draws from the other side of the hallway.

He also steps forward and wraps his hands around the silver bars. His skin sizzles a little, but he doesn’t so much as blink.

“And you’re the Texan wolf who slaughtered his own pack,” I reply in a clipped tone. “Glad we got the formalities out of the way, **now leave** me the hell **alone**.”

Instead of being insulted, Axel laughs. “Well, ain’t you got spunk? I’ll leave you be. But I would’ve thought an Alpha such as yourself would know not to believe every rumor that comes his way.”

Does he mean the gossip around his supposed misdeeds in Texas are not true?

But, of course he would say that.

Axel winks at me and then shifts to the back of his cell, whistling some jaunty tune as he makes himself comfortable on his cot.

The sound immediately gets on my nerves.

“Samsen!” I shout in frustration, hoping he’s still within earshot. “Tell me what the fuck you did with Leah!”

I don’t get a reply.

Other than that goddamn whistling.

Chapter 248

LEAH

It's been hours and I don't know how many times I've explained everything that happened to the various Councilmembers who've been in and out of the room they brought me to.

It's some kind of office, but sparsely furnished, like maybe it's expressly used for interviews or interrogations and not much else.

No one will tell me what happened to Aaron. I haven't seen him since we left Rathborn mansion. I wonder if he's simply in another room like this somewhere nearby.

Of course, everyone know the Council had cells in the

basement of this building for rogue wolves and others who break the Council's rules, but I'm hoping they didn't take Aaron down there.

He doesn't deserve to be locked up for trying to protect his family.

I'm not sure how much time has passed since the last round of questioning, and I wonder if anything I've told them has made any difference.

With each new set of questions—the same questions just asked in slightly different ways—it felt like they didn't believe a word I was saying. Like they were trying to poke holes in my story or find where I contradicted myself.

But they wouldn't catch me tripping up no matter how many times they made me retell it all.

It's the truth.

There's nothing else I can tell them.

Someone brought me food a while ago, but I didn't eat much.

It's hard to be hungry when I've been taken away from my infant son and I don't know what's happening to my mate, but I imagine it's nothing good.

The door opens and I quickly get to my feet, bracing myself for whatever they have in store for me next.

However, Aaron steps inside, escorted by two Enforcer wolves.

I rush across the distance between us, and Aaron meets me halfway, catching me up against him.

We hold each other tight, and I don't think I've even been so relieved to **see** him.

"Are you okay?" he asks in a low voice, running a hand through my hair.

"I'm fine," I tell him, shifting back so I can look up at him. "What about you? Where have you been?"

Aaron's expression tightens. "They've been holding me down. in the cells."

My heart drops at the confirmation of what I didn't want to hear.

"But things are sorted, right?" I ask hopefully. "We can go home?"

Aaron shakes his head. "They only let me see you because I refused to answer their questions until I saw for myself that you were okay."

Aaron takes me over to the table and we sit down.

"I don't have long," he continues, taking both my hands in his. "So I need you to listen to me, Leah."

I nod, apprehensive over what he's going to tell me.

"The Council will want to make this as public as possible.

They're going to use me as an example of what happens when anyone amasses more power than the Council want anyone to have. I doubt I'm going to get out of this alive."

"No, Aaron!" I say, sitting forward. "You have to fight!"

"I will fight," Aaron replies, cupping my face in one of his large palms. "But with most of the Council against me, I have to be realistic. They're probably going to sentence me to death, and then you're going to have to make a decision."

"What do you mean?" I ask, tightening my hold on him, as if that alone will keep him with me, stop him from walking away and being executed by the Council.

"They're going to give you a choice. Either remain mated to me and risk being killed by the mating bond after I'm gone. Or, risk breaking the mating bond in the hope you might survive it."

My heart starts pounding hard.

I can't believe this is happening.

I can't believe that's the only choice I'm going to have left.

"Leah," Aaron says gently, obviously able to see how distressed I am. "I need you to promise me that you will break the mating bond."

"*What?*" I demand, pulling my hands from his. "I would never

He catches me before I can get up.

"Think about it, Leah. What happens to Ethan if we both die?"

I go completely still at that.

Oh god.

Our son, who is barely a few months old, will be an orphan.

And what would happen to him then?

Chapter 249

Tears start trickling down my face.

“Aaron, we can’t let this happen!” I say desperately. “We have to prove you’re innocent.”

“I know, Leah, and believe me, James is working on it, along with a few other people who owe me favors. But we can’t count on them being able to convince the Council when it comes to the actual trial. It’s going to be a sham. They want an excuse to get rid of me and what I represent. So when the time comes, I need you to promise to break our mating bond. Maybe it’ll kill both of us. But I know you’re strong and determined. It’s the only chance we’ve got to make sure one of us goes home to Ethan.”

I nod through the tears, but it’s not enough for Aaron.

“Promise me, Leah,” he says in a gentle, but firm voice.

“I promise,” I managed to utter, though my voice is breaking with sadness.

Aaron pulls me into him and I bury my face into his shoulder, trying not to sob.

“I’m sorry you got dragged into this,” he says, his voice rough.

“I would do anything to keep you safe. You and Ethan. You know that, right?”

I nod, and then Aaron urges me to look up at him.

“I love you,” he says. “I’ll always love you. In this life and the next.”

I want to reply, but I’m too choked up.

Aaron leans in and kisses me gently, tenderly, and I can feel all of that love flowing over me.

It ends too soon, and then the Enforcers are telling Aaron his time is up.

Aaron gets **to** his feet, but I’m frozen, in denial that we’re even here and this is happening to us.

He tells me one last murmured goodbye, leans down to kiss me on the head, and then he walks out, leaving me alone in that sparse room.

I break down then, crying until my chest aches and I’m worried my heart is going to give out on me because it hurts that badly.

But once I get all that out of my system, my determination

kicks in.

I am not going to sit here crying and let my mate be taken from me.

I get up and go to the door, banging on it and yelling until finally one of the guards they left out in the hallway opens the door.

He tells me to shut the hell up, but I demand **to** see Karolina.

I'm not sure whether my request will be granted as the guard glares at me and then slams the door.

However, maybe ten minutes later, the door opens and

Karolina walks in.

"I hear you've been causing quite the commotion," Karolina says, crossing her arms and regarding me somewhat dispassionately.

I wonder if I've done the right thing in asking to see her, but it seemed like maybe she was trying to help me in the past, and I don't have any other good options right now.

"Councilwoman, I want to appeal to your sense of justice. I know you care about the future of wolves and the packs. How **can** we move forward if the Council is more interested in its own standing than carrying out actual justice?"

Karolina's **features** tighten, and I can tell I've hit **some** kind of nerve, I'm just not sure if it's a good thing or a bad thing.

"What do you mean?" she asks, and I hope that means she might be willing to listen and help me.

I tell her everything, from how Aaron ended up with the power of three Alphas, even though it was never an ambition of his, to the things my father and brother did, even about the AI tech and things I don't actually remember, like the attack on the hospital and how Aaron had to hide Ethan's existence even from me to keep him safe from those who would hurt him."

Karolina looks thoughtful by the time I'm finished my long-winded tale, but I still can't tell if it's swayed her to my side and she'll help me get Aaron out of this situation.

"You certainly have had quite the adventure," Karolina says with a small, reserved smile I can't read. "I can't make any promises of course, but I want to reassure you that I'm personally invested in making sure that AI tech ends up in the right hands and that this situation resolves in a satisfactory manner."

“Thank you, Councilwoman,” I say in relief, but there’s **still** this hint of unease I can’t quite shake.

It’s probably not surprising considering everything I’ve been through. That apprehension will probably stick with me until both Aaron and I are home safe with Ethan.

And maybe we’re one step closer to that now that I’ve spoken with Karolina.

Karolina bids me goodbye and then leaves the room.

Now all I can do is hope.

And wait.

Chapter 250

An entire day goes by, and no matter how much I ask after both Aaron and Karolina, no one will tell me anything and no other Councilmembers come to see me.

I’m getting meals regularly and the night before they brought a cot in for me to sleep on.

At least they’re seeing to my basic needs, but it makes me worried about how long they plan to keep me here like this without telling me anything.

Later that afternoon, the door opens, and I’m surprised and relieved when James walks into holding Ethan.

“Oh my god!” I cry in relief as I get up from where I’d been sitting on the couch and hurry over to them.

James hugs me and then hands over Ethan.

I’m so relieved to be holding him again, but it makes me even sadder about the fact I can’t go home.

I never thought I’d miss someone so much who I’d known for such a short amount of time.

“How are you?” James asks, a note of concern in his voice.

I send him a lightly admonishing look. “About how you’d expect. Next question?”

He gives a quick laugh and then goes to sit on one of the chairs at the table.

I join him and set Ethan on my knee. He grabs a fistful of my hair, seeming fascinated by it.

“How are things with the packs?” I ask, not sure I want to know. But I’m still Luna, even if I am being held by the Council right now.

“The packs are okay,” James says, his expression serious. “There’s a lot of rumors flying around right now. Most people are obviously on your side, but outside our own packs, other wolves are believing the things the Council is saying about what Aaron did.”

I definitely don’t need to hear whatever misinformation the Council is putting out to tarnish Aaron’s reputation. It’ll only make me angry, and right now I’ve got nowhere to direct that anger.

I just have to keep hoping that if Karolina can’t intervene before the supposed trial, she’ll be able to use her sway to help the result go our way during the actual hearing.

James looks troubled, and I can tell there’s something else on his mind, something else he’s not sure whether he should tell

1. me.

“What else is happening?” I ask, giving him a gentle nudge.

He sighs in resignation. “The Council have taken temporary control of all four packs—Rathborn, Roberts, Leithrow and your new Havelock pack.”

“What?” I demand. I’d heard of this happening before in other situations when Alphas have gone rogue or broken serious Council rules, but those instances have been few and far between.

I didn’t imagine it would happen here and now with Aaron.

“It’s true, I’m sorry,” James says. “They’ve told us that anyone who tries to help you or Aaron will also be held and charged with treason.”

“Oh my god,” I whisper in shock.

Aaron’s right.

The Council doesn’t seem interested in him having a fair trial.

They’re doing everything they can to make sure Aaron **goes** down and it looks legitimate under their ruling.

“I’m sorry, Leah,” James says sadly. “I wish I had better news.”

“It’s okay. None of this is your fault, and I’d rather know the truth.”

James nods, but he doesn’t look any less miserable.

I reach over and squeeze his hand. "Please tell our pack members I'm thinking of them, and I'm doing everything in my power to get home to them."

James gives me a small smile. "You've always been a natural-born Luna. I just wish we'd all realized it sooner and not treated you so terribly because of who your father was."

"That's in the past, James," I tell him with a shake of my head. "I don't hold it against anyone. I'd rather look forward than look back, especially now that I have a son to raise."

"And that's why you're a better Luna than most of us probably deserve." James squeezes my hand in return. "We're all praying that you and Aaron come home safely."

However, in James's gaze, I can see the truth.

He hopes, but he doesn't believe.

He thinks this **is** the end for Aaron, if not both of us.

I can't blame him for thinking that way.

We're in an impossible situation.

But I'm choosing to believe justice will prevail.

If I don't have that hope, I don't have anything, and I've already lost enough in this life without losing hope as well.

One of the Enforcers who has been standing by the door, monitoring our visit clears his throat.

"Your time is up, Beta."

James reaches over and I reluctantly hand Ethan back, wondering when I'll get to see him and hold him again.

How much longer will the Council hold us before they have their damn trial?

"Be safe, Luna," James tells me with a slight bow.

But then I ruin the formality of the moment by stepping forward to hug him. "Look after yourself, James, and my son **as** well."

"Of course, always," James murmurs, sending me one last sad smile, before walking out of the room.

“Wait, please,” I say to the Enforcer before he can step out. “Can you please ask about getting an update from Councilwoman Karolina?”

The Enforcer gives a short nod, but that doesn’t really tell me anything, before he closes the door and I’m alone in the silence again.

It’s suffocating, that silence.

It feels like I’ve already been condemned to my coffin.