

## Bad Love 297

Chapter 297

LEAH

I hold Ethan closer trying to calm him, but with the feeling of malevolence in the air, I can't blame my son for the way he's screaming.

"Evacuate the pack to the emergency bunker," Aaron tells me in a low voice.

"What's happening?" I whisper fearfully, even though I doubt he has any more of an idea than I do.

"I'm not sure. It feels like-But it can't be. It doesn't make sense," Aaron replies. "You oversee the evacuation, I need to head down to the front gate. They're not answering my calls."

My stomach pitches with anxiety.

If the sentries at the gate aren't answering Aaron's calls-maybe because they can't-then something bad must have happened.

Aaron tugs me in for a quick kiss, and then I turn to James, who is standing alert nearby.

"We need to begin evacuating to the emergency bunker," I say to him..

He nods and starts off to do just that, but in that moment, there's this loud bang that echoes through the house.

James starts herding freaked out pack members through the house, but I turn and follow Aaron where he's hurrying toward the front of the mansion and the source of that loud banging noise.

Halfway down the hallway, this dark, icy cold, terrible wave of power washes over me, and my footsteps falter.

Ethan isn't crying anymore, he's quietened down to whimpering, his face turned into my chest.

I stay close to the wall, keeping an eye on Aaron as he slows and three people come into view.

Well, people might not be the right word.

Two men and a woman, all ethereally beautiful.

I've never met a vampire in person before, but I've got absolutely no doubt that's what I'm looking at right now.

"What are you doing here?" Aaron demands in a hard voice. "Do you know how many ancient treaties you've broken by setting foot on wolf territory? By arriving unannounced at my home?"

The vampires somehow look bored and maliciously gleeful at the same time.

"About the same number you broke by coming onto vampire territory and interfering with things you had no right to stick

your wet dog nose into," one of the vampires says in return, in this perfectly polished accent.

"I didn't set foot on your territory willingly," Aaron replies coolly. "I was taken there-"

"By Karolina, we know," the woman says, crossing her arms. "But your mate and her lap dog certainly had a choice when they followed after you."

Aaron doesn't say anything, but I can see the tension running through his shoulders, how he's on high alert and ready for anything.

"All they did was rescue me. We left as soon as we were able. We didn't interfere with any vampire business.'

"Ah, but you did," the third vampire says, and my entire body freezes, my blood turning to ice.

I know that voice.

But it can't be.

It doesn't make sense.

That vampire sounds like the military contact Liam-and even I-spoke to regularly about the ongoing progress of the AI weapon.

"You see, Karolina was finishing up a deal we started with Liam Roberts," the familiar-sounding vampire says, and right in that

"To hand over the AI tech the Roberts pack were designing and building for us," the vampire finishes, and I can see Aaron trying not to react to this news.

I can practically see his wolf rippling under the surface of his skin, wanting to shift, to lash out at the danger and defend his pack.

"Karolina and Liam were working with you?" Aaron demands, disgust dripping from every word.

I can't believe it myself.

Did Liam know his supposed military contact was actually a vampire? Or was he taken in by the lie?

Maybe he only told me it was a military contract because he knew I wouldn't take it well if I found out we were working with vampires.

Clearly Karolina knew who she was working with.

And now the things Ryker said, about what Karolina was doing going against Ryker's morals, makes sense.

I'm confused and terrified.

How could any wolf willingly work with vampires?

Never mind the packs warring within themselves.

The ancient war with the vampires had almost wiped out both species centuries ago.

A peace treaty had only been drawn up because both races had come horrifyingly close to extinction.

Whole houses and bloodlines had been slaughtered.

Wolves had the advantage of being able to shift, as well as our animal instinct.

However, a single vampire bite was deadly to a wolf. If the vampire didn't simply drain them on the spot, then they would still die hours later from the poison of the bite.

Meanwhile, vampires got a temporary boost of raw power after drinking from a wolf.

There'd been a few incidences over the years where misunderstandings or mistakes had threatened the peace between wolves and vampires.

But no vampires had ever gone so far as to brazenly walk onto any wolf territory the way these three had tonight.

I didn't even want to think what consequences this night would bring for our pack and wolves at large.

We couldn't afford to go to war with the vampires.

Because there was every chance that wolves simply wouldn't survive it.

"We had a mutually beneficial agreement in place, yes," the collect."

## Chapter 298

It's the worst news possible.

The vampires hold us accountable for Karolina failing to hand over the AI tech.

I just can't believe how far Karolina had gone in her quest to usher in a new future for wolves-whatever she thought that entailed.

How could she believe making deals with vampires would be beneficial to anyone?

In one way, I'm glad we unknowingly interfered and prevented the deal from going ahead.

Only god knew what the vampires would do, but wiping out wolves would have been high on their list of priorities, I suspect.

However, it's bad news all around.

We destroyed the drive.

There's nothing to hand over any longer.

And I can only imagine how that will enrage the vampires when they discover the truth.

Even if it was still intact, there's no way we could have handed it

Technology like that in the hands of vampires would be at nightmare scenario.

"We don't owe you anything," Aaron says, his posture becoming even more rigid, like he's expecting a fight any second now.

He might have the power of three Alphas, and he might even have a chance of actually killing the vampires where they stand.

But a single bite, and his life would be over.

And the fragile peace treaty between wolves and vampires would be destroyed.

It would become a free-for-all.

It would make the pack wars that ruled our childhoods-that I was forced to sacrifice my teenage years for-look like a walk in the park.

"Perhaps you think so," replies the first male vampire who spoke. "But Roberts pack was designing and building the software for us. The contract still stands, as the product has not been delivered. I believe you are both Alpha of the Roberts pack and majority-share CEO of Roberts Corp. Does it not then make you uniquely responsible, meaning that you do, in fact, owe us?"

I can tell Aaron isn't happy about having his status turned on its head like that.

"Ryker took the AI tech after he killed Karolina," Aaron states flatly. "Go find him and ask about your device."

"If only we could," the female vampire replies with a delicate shrug. "But alas, he tucked tail and ran right back to Romania."

"And our intel suggests he didn't take the software with him," finishes the first male vampire.

“You will obtain it,” the other male vampire says. “Either the original or a new copy, we don’t much care. You have two weeks. And should you fail, then you can explain to your wolf Council and the Vampire Enclave of Elders how it’s your fault the peace treaty was broken.”

My heart pounds at the way these vampires have twisted everything up.

How they’re going to make it look like wolves-Roberts pack in particular-broke the treaty so they can justify slaughtering every single one of us.

Damn my brother and father for getting us into this mess!

How could they do something so foolish?

Surely no amount of money was worth this.

Messing with things this dangerous.

Creating something that had the potential to affect the lives of every single wolf in every pack, not just our own Roberts pack.

“I am the Council,” Aaron says in a hard voice. “And we will not bow to threats or manipulation.”

“Suit yourself,” one of the male vampires says in a bored tone, as if he doesn’t actually care either way.

“I hope you fail,” the female vampire says menacingly. “I hope you’re foolish enough to go against us. It’s been too long since I’ve felt the high from drinking wolf blood.”

“The second you feed on a wolf, you will be the ones who break the treaty,” Aaron responds in a hard voice. “And how will your Vampire Enclave feel about that?”

The female vampire isn’t deterred.

“We can bide our time, as we have been doing for decades. We are immortal, where you wolves have lives spanning not much longer than that of a human. Pathetic. We will drink wolf blood once again-as should be our natural born right-and it will be a tragedy of your own making.”

“Leave my house. Now,” Aaron says, injecting every ounce of threatening Alpha into the words that he can.

It’s so powerful that it makes me want to cower and become submissive, and he’s my mate!

The vampires all back up a little, as if now just realizing the extent of Aaron’s true power.

Heli, Emily comes rushing in with Axel trailing along behind her.

All of the vampires swing their collective gazes toward the pair, and immediately, the air becomes even more hostile and tense.

I can’t tell if the vampires are looking at Emily, Axel, or both, but it’s clear something is going on beneath the surface.

If Aaron notices, he doesn’t say anything.

He simply shifts his stance so he’s blocking the vampire’s line of sight along the hallway.

“You have two weeks,” one of the male vampires reiterates.

“And then we’re coming for your pack first,” the female vampire says.

Her icy, soulless gaze moves to where I’m holding Ethan, and she flashes a hint of fangs.

“I do so enjoy the blood of the young and innocent...”

Chapter 299

EMILY

The presence of the vampires is somehow alluring and horrifying all at the same time.

I’m both terrified and intrigued.

But I’m also worried about how they looked at me when I walked in with Axel just now.

Is it somehow possible they can sense my secret?

Can they tell I’m not fully a wolf any longer?

That I’m a freak and a monster instead?

There are questions I wish I could ask them.

But the vampire would probably be more likely to kill me than answer my questions. I’m not sure there is anyone I can trust, I’d thought I could trust my brother, but he isn’t the same.

Nothing is the same as I remember it.

Aaron projects the full power of his Alpha strength, commanding the bloodsuckers to get the hell out of his house, and this time they listen.

by

deep, powerful Alpha vibration in

Aaron’s tone.

I’ve never heard any Alpha command power like that before.

It even seems to give the vampires pause, and I doubt they’ve ever come across a wolf that might be an actual threat to them before.

Aaron walks to the door after the vampires, and slams it closed when they’re gone.

He pauses and takes a breath, as if gathering himself, and then spins to face us, stalking across the foyer until he reaches where we’re standing just near Leah, who is leaning against the wall looking pale.

Ethan starts crying, and Aaron takes him, trying to calm his son.

“What the hell was that?” Aaron demands, looking suspiciously at Axel.

“What was what?” Axel asks dispassionately in return, obviously not as affected by Aaron’s scary Alpha tone.

“The way the vampires reacted when you walked in just now,” Aaron says, eyes narrowing. “Do you know them?”

“I ain’t ever seen those vampires in my life,” Axel responds, and somehow, I know he’s telling the truth. Maybe just not the whole truth.

But Aaron has it wrong.

The vampires weren’t looking at Axel, they were looking at me.

I’m so freaked out by it, I can’t bring myself to speak up and admit it.

Doing so would create questions that I can’t answer.

Because if I did answer them, Aaron would never look at me the same way again.

I only just got home after ten years of being imprisoned.

I have nowhere else to go.

I can’t lose my family and my pack all over again.

I mean, it’s probably going to happen eventually.

A secret like mine, I can’t keep it forever.

But I just need time to figure out what I’m going to do once I become a pariah.

“Axel, if there’s something I need to know-”

“There ain’t,” Axel insists stubbornly. “Nothing that affects you or this pack.”

very specific. wonder if Aaron notices.

He doesn’t look convinced, but Ethan is still fussing, and it’s obviously not the time to get into things.

“I’ll take Ethan to Tara, then we can talk,” Leah says, taking Ethan back again. “We should also let James bring the wolves out from the bunker. Aaron, you’ll want to be prepared to address the pack.”

Aaron nods.

“What did the vampires want?” I ask as Leah hurries off toward the back of the house.

“The software project that the old Roberts Alpha and Liam were working on. Apparently, it was meant for them all along.”

“What?” I gasp.

Between Jessica and one or two housekeepers, I'd been filled in on all the recent happenings within the pack.

Some of the details had made me angry-like how the Roberts pack had dragged Aaron into this mess with the cutting-edge weapon system and all the problems that've been created since then-which had only convinced me that I'd been right the first time.

Roberts pack are poison.

They should be our enemy, not part of our pack by marriage or

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power, or any of it.

Aaron should have destroyed and disbanded the pack once and for all when he came into possession of the Roberts Alpha

powers.

He should have banished Leah and any other Roberts wolf associated with her.

We wouldn't be in this mess with the vampires today if that'd been the case.

But I know I can't say that to Aaron.

At least not right now.

He doesn't want to see the truth for what it is.

Somehow, I have to make him see how bad the Roberts are, right down to the core, and trying to make them part of our community will be like poisoning the well.

"It's a mess," Aaron says, sounding weary. "I'm just as shocked. I want to believe that the vampires tricked Liam, and he really thought he was working for the military, but I get the feeling he was probably foolish enough to knowingly deal with the vampires and lie to Leah about it."

"What are you going to do?" I ask, concerned for how this is going to come back onto us-onto Rathborn pack-when we were nothing but innocent bystanders to another pack's idiotic

mess.

"Honestly, I don't know right now," Aaron says. "Like Leah said, we need to talk. To figure out our options."

"The Roberts pack got us into this mess!" I say heatedly, unable to hold my tongue any longer. "Do you really think talking to Leah will do anything other than make things worse?"

I know it's a mistake as soon as Aaron's eyes narrow on me.

But damn it, why can't I speak the truth?

Why can't my brother see his mate for the snake in the grass that she really is.

“This doesn’t concern you, Emily,” Aaron replies dismissively. “Why don’t you retire for the night?”

“Are you sending me to bed!? What, am I a child!?” I cross my arms and glare angrily at him. “First you tell me I need to come to this stupid party because the pack is partly my responsibility because I’m your sister, and now, when the pack is in danger, you’re just dismissing me and telling me it’s not my concern? You can’t have it both ways, Aaron.”

“In case you forgot, the pack is a hierarchy, Emily,” Aaron tells me in a sharp voice. “And while you may be in the upper echelons by virtue of birth alone, you’re still required to follow the word of your Alpha like Gospel. Do you understand?”

I feel my temperature rising dangerously, my wolf about to burst out and claw Aaron’s stupid face off.

“I’ll take her upstairs,” Axel says smoothly, grabbing my arm. “It’s been a long day for everyone.”

Before I can agree or argue, Aaron nods and strides off, while Axel tugs me toward the stairs.

It’s probably a good thing Axel intervened, because for a second there, I wasn’t sure whether I would be able to control myself.

And if I’d attacked Aaron, it would have only reinforced his idea that I was fragile, broken, not to be trusted and needing Axel as my constant minder.

But I’m not going to thank Axel for interfering like that.

Acting like he has any right to talk for me, or help me, when he rejected me as his mate.

I pull my arm out of his hold and march silently up the stairs.

However, once I arrive in my room, I’m at a loss as to what to do now.

I’m all agitated and want to run, but I doubt Axel’s going to let me do that again.

And I don’t need his permission anyway!

But with the vampires being here a few minutes ago, the dark outside my window looks threatening instead of inviting.

Wer? Axel suggests, and though

he’s trying to play it cool, somehow, I can tell he’s actually impatient to leave. “I want to consult with James about stepping up security for you and Leah. I’ll come back and check on you in a while.”

Axel doesn’t even wait for me to reply, simply strides out of the room and slams the door behind him.

I’m not sure if it’s because we were meant to be mates, and I’m somehow connected or more heightened in my awareness of him, but somehow, I know he’s lying.

He’s not going to talk to James.

He’s sneaking off to do something else.



The questions is, what the hell is Axel up to?