

## **Bad Love 31**

### Chapter 31

AARON

What the he ll?

Leah pitches sideways onto the floor and convulses.

She gags and coughs again and more blood splatters the ground.

This isn't panic or even some manic episode. This is more than grief.

Something is very wrong.

I jam my phone and keys into my pocket and sweep Leah up into my arms. I don't bother with shoes or locking the door. I barrel out of the little cabin and start the hike up the incline, running as much as I can and only slowing so I don't jostle her too hard or let her fall.

She's wheezing and she doesn't smell right.

Her body is cold and light and she groans with every little movement.

I think she might be delirious.

In the aftermath of some battles, I can remember some of my packmates going into shock. Women would go catatonic at the sight of a dead son or husband. And our warriors coming back, they would lose their minds when their loved ones were assaulted in their absence.

I had my own meltdown once and the rage I unleashed...it definitely played a part in this war.

If Leah knew the whole truth...

If she knew the many ways I've wronged her...

She starts gasping in earnest and I listen for her heartbeat. She wails and twitches then goes lifeless in my arms. I lift her body to my ear and press her chest to my head listening for her pulse, but as the seconds tick by I don't hear one.

My wolf howls in my head.

My own heart is racing.

I drag her against me so her face is close to mine. "Leah!"

But she doesn't move, doesn't respond.

I lunge the last forty feet up the mountain and debate whether to put her down and begin CPR or to get her in the truck and to a doctor.

She isn't a wolf where I can command her wolf to rise.

She isn't my mate where I can drag her back from the other side with my own life force.

She's an orphaned girl teetering on the edge of this realm.

What the hell is wrong with her!?

I put her on the hood of the car and begin chest compressions. As I'm breathing into her mouth and forcing air into her lungs, I grab my phone.

I hit Jame's contact. "Track my location, get an emergency team here."

"What?"

"Now!"

I toss the phone aside and pump on her chest again. I have to manage my strength so I don't crack her sternum or rupture a lung. When I force my air into her, her chest inflates.

But then... nothing.

Chapter 32

"Why didn't you try to change her?"

It's Adam.

He's a bonafide pain in my ass, and if he thinks I owe him any kind of explanation, he has another thing coming.

I sit by Leah's bedside.

"I asked you a question," Adam growls.

I lunge out of my seat and tackle him to the ground.

For a leaner wolf, he's strong.

I wrench his arm behind his back until I hear it snap.

His eyes shoot blue. He's an Arctic wolf from the same line as Leah's family, and he doesn't back down. With his other arm, he punches me in the face. I hear the snap of my nose before the pain shoots into my brain.

"Motherfu-"

He elbows me in the spleen and I pummel his kidneys with my fist.

Adam swings his arm and tries to smash my face into the floor.

We grapple and I come out on top. I slam his skull into the ground. Again and again.

"Get off our resident doctor, Aaron."

We both freeze and glance toward the door to the patient room. Liam Roberts leans against the closed door with his arms

crossed.

I shove off of Adam and rise slowly.

We're in a public hospital and there are humans everywhere.

We can't shift and a dead body will be really hard to explain. There's a pool of blood on the ground where I likely cracked

Adam's skull.

He disappears into the patient bathroom to take care of his injuries.

I move off to the center of the room, keeping Liam in my sight and maneuvering so I am physically blocking his path to his

sister.

Liam has every reason to hate me and I suspect Adam does too.

"This pact," Liam says. "It's over. My sister isn't leaving here with you."

I snarl. "You just try it."

Adam exits the restroom and moves to stand beside Liam. They're both tall. Lean. Liam's hair is the same dark color as his sister's. Their eyes have the same hazel color too. Liam's a few years older than her which has me thinking he should've done more to protect her back then.

He wouldn't have been old, but he would've been old enough. "If you were thinking of standing up for your sister, you should've done it years ago. When she was a child in need of protecting."

Liam growls.

I square my shoulders. I won't back down.

"Aaron," Adam says quietly. He snaps his arm back into place. The crunch of bone has to hurt. "You need to let her go."

He looks sad and defeated and the abrupt change in his mood makes me uncomfortable.

Something doesn't feel right about this.

About any of it.

One of the human doctors comes into the room and glances around at the machinery that's on the ground. She picks up a monitor and resets the electronics. She stares at the blood and

then looks at each of us.

Adam must've shifted at least partially to hide and heal the damage to his skull. But from the angle, I can still see blood on the back collar of his white lab coat.

The female physician thinks better of commenting on the mess we've made.

"I need to have paperwork signed by her legal partner or next of kin."

"I'm her husband." I step toward the physician.

"Actually," Liam interrupts. "He isn't. Their marriage was never valid."

Chapter 33

I curse.

The female doctor senses the tension in the room. "I'll be at the nurse's station. When you sort this out, the legal family or spouse can come and sign the necessary documents." She looks at Adam. "Doctor, I'll leave you to it in the interim."

Adam nods.

When the door closes I growl at Liam. "Where the hell do you get off-"

"What?" Liam's eyes flash. "Did you think you were the only one who could infiltrate a pack? The only one who could do their homework?"

My hands flex at my sides.

I glance at Leah, where she lies lifeless in that hospital bed. Her eyes are closed and her face is pale. She's hooked up to all different wires and machines and tubes.

"You underwent a ceremony with Jessica Matherson," Liam says. "You wed her. And though you did not log this with human records or even within your own pack as a formal match, that doesn't mean the vows weren't exchanged."

Sonofabitch. How can they know this?

It's not common knowledge. I don't even know if it's valid.

Years ago, when it was decided that an arranged marriage was the only way forward. I agreed to it. It was a last ditch effort to keep the peace within my own home. Jess...she was heartbroken. I'd thought I was going to end up with Jessica and we'd been dating for a long time. So when Jessica started spouting vows as if we were pledging ourselves to each other, I went along with it.

I didn't consider it real.

At least, I don't now.

At the time I said those words, I had hated everything about Pack Roberts and I was only going along with the peace treaty because we couldn't afford any more losses.

I didn't know Leah.

It's funny how time changes things.

How feelings that seemed so strong can change into indifference, and where once there was no bond at all, some deeper

connection can grow.

Liam's eyes narrow. "That little ceremony with your beta's

sister, it makes your 'marriage' to my sister invalid. And as the new Alpha of Pack Roberts I insist that she is returned to her family."

"No."

Just that one word.

I don't owe them anything. Not an explanation or excuse.

"A handfast marriage is recognized by pack law, Aaron. It is the old way. And as Alpha, you know that."

I think about what Liam said. He's aware of the situation with Jessica. But he couldn't have known for long. If he had, I have to think he would've tried to get Leah back sooner.

Maybe.

I refuse to discuss Jessica with him. "Leah and I are married in the eyes of our packs. Your father's pledge to me was unalterable—or have you forgotten the blood debt."

"Any debt we owed is paid. This is done."

"Leah is mine."

Adam shoves his hands into the pockets of his lab coat. "No. I don't think she is."

"She vowed, not two days ago, to be mine. To stay mine." And I'd hold her to that promise. "Surely, you don't think that what transpired at the Regional Council is the last of things."

Liam bristles. "You set us up. And I'm going to prove it."

"How? The only way to prove your innocence would be to incriminate your sister. Let it go."

"No."

"Your father is dead. The drama of his actions can be buried with him. There is no reason to further incriminate yourselves or my wife."

Liam smirks. "She's not your wife. And if I have the Council call you and your precious wh ore Jessica to testify, they'll side with us and invalidate your marriage to Leah."

"I won't let that happen."

My wolf ripples beneath my skin. They won't take her from me. "Are you prepared to fight? Because that is what it will take..."

Adam looks at Liam. They nod. "Oh we're ready to fight... and you may think you have the upper hand, that we're a bunch of idiots that you can push around like chess pieces in a game, but you're about to find out that we're ready for war. And, Aaron, this war has already started..."

Chapter 34

I tense wondering if my lands are under attack as I'm standing here.

It's a distinct possibility.

If I was in their shoes, I wouldn't wait for a more powerful adversary to show up on my doorstep, I'd take the fight to them and use the element of surprise.

It's how I'd leveled the playing field with the Roberts Pack a decade ago.

That strategy was the only thing that kept us alive and let us broker the peace in the first place.

"You've overplayed your hand," Liam says. "Furthermore, the actions you took against my father are in direct violation of the peace treaty."

"Are you forgetting that he harassed my wife and demanded that she steal money from her own pack to send to him? That's on Roberts. Not on me."

"I'm not going to debate with you," Liam says.

Adam nods. "At the end of the day, you know this is best for Leah. You can fight and yell all you want, but you're the same monster that locked her away for a week with no food. You don't

deserve her. You never did.

"Give us a minute," a soft voice says.

We all turn to the hospital bed.

Leah's eyes are open.

"Adam, Liam, can you give me a few minutes with Aaron please?"

Liam nods. "I think it's better if we stay here, sister."

She winces as if in pain. "Maybe you can get me something from the cafeteria? I'm hungry."

Neither male moves.

"It's okay," Leah reassures them. "He isn't going to hurt me while I'm here. There are too many witnesses."

Wow. That's some damning thing to say.

"You're my wife. I'm not going to hurt you. Period."

She cocks her head and it's obvious she disagrees. Her expression all but says that I have hurt her. Repeatedly.

"Please," she addresses Adam and Liam. "Give me a few minutes."

They ultimately nod and respect her wishes.

I wait for her kin to leave the room. When the door closes I cross to her bedside. I feel compelled to reiterate: "I'm not going to

hurt you,

Leah.”

She closes her eyes. “Not all inflictions can be seen.”

“How much did you hear?” I ask her.

“All of it.”

I wait.

She doesn’t speak.

I give it another minute. “And...?” I prompt.

“And what? You’re the reason my father is dead. He killed himself as a direct result of the treachery you orchestrated. I’m done, Aaron. Finished.”

“You made a vow in those Council chambers-”

“That vow...the one I made in the Council Meeting was to save my father. My father is dead. And we made vows prior-to love, honor and cherish. You’ve never done any of those things.”

Tears leak from the corners of her eyes.

It physically pains me to see them.

“Tell me the truth, Aaron. Did you pledge yourself to Jessica before you knew me?”

Chapter 35

LEAH

“Don’t debate, don’t make excuses. It’s a simple question. Yes or no,” I say.

Aaron’s dark eyes are narrowed. He goes to reach for my hand and I yank it back.

“Aaron! Answer me.”

“Yes.’

What’s left of my heart breaks. Everything has been a lie. From the moment I set foot in his home. He’s always planned to rid himself of me, to wed and mate and make a family with another person.

I’ve been used and abused for years.

And my sacrifices, my love, every slight I’ve put up with...it’s all been for nothing.

“You should leave,” I tell him.

“Not without you.”

I don't have the strength to argue. My body hurts. My heart aches and I'm having a very difficult time thinking of a reason to

keep on living.

There are two sharp knocks on the door then the female ducks her head in.

"Oh, good," she says. "You're up."

She briskly strides into the room and grabs my chart. She notes some things before coming over to examine me.

Aaron steps out of the way but doesn't leave.

I read her namelag. "Dr. Moore, I would like to request that all information pertaining to my health is only shared directly with me. If there are forms I need to fill out, I will."

She nods. "A nurse will come by with the documents."

"Thank you." I look at the man who at one time had meant everything to me. "Aaron, I think it's best if you went home. There's nothing more for you to do here."

"I'll wait. You might need something."

He's trying, I'll give him that. But this man has single handedly broken me. "No. I don't need anything from you." I turn to the physician. "Dr. Moore, can you please contact security?"

"This isn't over, Leah." Aaron's eyes glow.

The doctor doesn't pick up on it because she's too busy studying my vitals, but I see. Aaron's shaking with anger and frustration

and I hold my breath waiting to see if he'll leave or if this will turn into an even greater travesty.

Abruptly, he storms out of the room.

Dr. Moore and I both breathe sighs of relief.

"I was worried," she admits quietly. "He's a big sonofagun. And he doesn't seem like the kind of guy to give up. Or give in."

"He isn't."

"We can step up the security around your room and I can instruct the staff to temporarily restrict him from the premises. But if you're in real danger, you need to file a restraining order. We don't have the resources to monitor your room or to ensure that he can't access you. If he has harmed you, we need to call the police."

"You know my prognosis, right?"

Her eyes are kind, sympathetic as she nods. "Yes. I'm sorry."

"Well, seeing as how I'm dying, there's not a whole lot that my husband can actually do to me."



This time she looks uncomfortable. "I wouldn't be too sure about that. Predators... they don't take too kindly to losing."

Hmm. Aaron is a predator.

This human doctor got that part right.

But if he was already married to Jessica, then he never had me to 'lose' in the first place...

## Chapter 36

### AARON

The conversation at the hospital with Liam and Adam plays over and over in my mind as I sit in the main dining room of the mansion. And then Leah...throwing me out. Leah telling me we're done. Leah silencing the doctor and demanding that her medical information only be relayed to her.

What is she hiding?

And how the hell did Liam know about something that happened here before Leah even arrived?

"Aaron, is everything okay? You're not eating."

We're in the formal dining room of the mansion. I'm seated at the head of the table. Jessica stands beside me, switching her weight from foot to foot nervously.

She wrings her hands and tries again to gain my attention. "The food is getting cold."

Chef has made a slew of dishes-all of Leah's favorites. Funny, if asked a week ago, if I knew what food she liked, I wouldn't have known. But the details come into focus.

There's salmon and steaks. Roasted vegetables and a giant bowl of mashed potatoes. Biscuits, baked sweet potatoes and brussel

sprouts-yes, she actually really likes those.

When you stand to lose someone, you remember things about them you don't even realize you know.

The delicious scent of apples and cinnamon pours out of the kitchen. Apple pies.

"Aaron, it's over." She pours me a flute of Champagne and one for herself. Then she sits next to me.

"We don't have to deal with those dreadful Roberts anymore! With the Alpha gone and their pack in disarray, there is nothing for us to worry about. You did it, Aaron. You have avenged our families!"

She deserves to feel joy and vindication for her parents and elder brother. She lost so much. But I can't seem to find the

same satisfaction in what I've done.

I don't feel anything, really.

“Leah wants a divorce. And with the old Alpha gone, you can give her one,” she says like it’s a prompt to a larger conversation

And it is, it’s just not a conversation I have any interest in having with her.

I say nothing.

She takes a sip of Champagne and licks the bubbles off her upper lip.

“You can even claim their lands, before the divorce. At least a portion of them.” Her eyes light up. “That brother of hers is as deranged as the father. Once someone puts him down, there will be a clear path to their lands and all their resources.”

She’s speaking plainly and there isn’t actually anything wrong with what she’s saying. The plan is sound. I’ve been buying up Roberts lands and stocks in preparation of a moment just like this. She isn’t voicing any ideas I haven’t already mulled over.

Except the divorce that is.

There will be no divorce.

And as to Liam... he won’t be so easy to displace.

“We’re out of danger now.” She raises her glass in a toast. “You’ve led us to this victory, Aaron.”

Maybe. But it doesn’t feel like a victory.

“Aaron, have a drink. We have so much to celebrate.”

Her blue eyes are lively and bright. She’s smiling.

But I don’t drink. And I don’t share her joy.

“The Roberts may seek to retaliate for the death of their Alpha,” I say quietly.

“But it was suicide.”

“That may be. But tensions are high between us.”

“They don’t have the nerve to attack you. You’re too powerful. Surely they know that.”

“Perhaps.” But I didn’t get to where we are by underestimating an adversary. Besides... “We still haven’t uncovered the motive behind the wolves that attacked here.”

It’s been maybe a week since those four wolves breached our lands and targeted me and Leah, but it feels like a lifetime ago. So much has happened since.

“Those wolves?” she scoffs. “They weren’t a threat.”

“Really Jessica?” My hands curl into fists and my blood runs cold. “How do you know?!”

Chapter 37

Jessica pales.

She's like a fawn. Her eyes dart around nervously, but there is nowhere to go.

"I asked you a question."

She licks her lips to moisten them. It's one of her nervous habits. "I, uh, just meant that they didn't stand a chance against us.

I look at her as if seeing her for the first time. It's true she's always underfoot and I'm as familiar with her as I am with myself.

But I don't know that I've really seen her.

Not in a very long time.

"Are you happy, Jess?"

If my first question made her nervous, this one has her even more unsettled. She bites her lip hard and lowers her gaze.

Jessica is twenty-nine years old. And, as far as I know, she's been alone for at least as long as Leah has lived beneath this roof in our home.

I think of the wolves. They attacked me that fateful day, but they'd been willing to die to kill Leah.

"Did you do something stupid, Jess?"

She can't look me in the eye. Her gaze skirts around the room.

"Sonofabitch!" I slam my hand on the table.

The glasses tip over and shatter and the dishes jump.

"I didn't do anything!" she insists.

But I think she played a part or she knows who did.

My claws extend through my fingertips and I feel my spine starting to curve. "Get out!"

She runs from the dining room, terrified. But there is nowhere she can go or hide where I won't find her.

I flip the giant table, sending it flying into the sideboard. The food and glass and porcelain shatter all over the floor.

James strolls into the room. He lets out a low whistle. "Chef spent hours on that meal."

My body is partially shifted but I'm coherent enough to speak. "Was it you?"

I should shift fully and run. I need to get this rage out of my system so I can think and act rationally, because I'm not good to anyone-myself included-with my emotions as clouded as they

are.

And I really don't want to kill one of my own packmates, if I can help it.

At least not yet.

James frowns at the table. It's a huge antique and the intricately carved oak has cracked in half. "This table has been in our pack for generations."

I retract my claws and wait for my jaw to realign. The muscles in my forearms burn as they contort to my human shape.

"I'll only ask once more, James. Was it you?"

"It wasn't me."

"But you know who planned the attack."

"I have my suspicions. It didn't originate in our pack, Aaron. I know what you're thinking, but—"

"You mean the evidence I have that your sister is colluding with our enemies and may have been behind an assault that nearly killed her Alpha and Luna."

James grimaces. "She loves you. She's always loved you. This hasn't been easy on her, seeing Leah everyday."

I won't mince words. "Did Jess do this? Did she set this up, and did you, as my beta, look the other way?"

## Chapter 38

### LEAH

The IV in my arm pumps in a saline solution now. But there is another bag of yellowish liquid that they're waiting to administer.

Chemotherapy.

Adam came in with an oncologist and they outlined a treatment plan. I didn't pay attention to the specifics of it. I trust that Adam will guide me toward the best treatment. And they seem to have a plan mapped out and the chemo ready to go. They're waiting on some last blood tests that Adam ordered and then I'll begin treatment.

I stare at that bag of chemicals like it's an enemy-and yet it's my only hope.

My chances of survival are low. The oncologist that visited with me was very clear about that. I appreciate the honesty.

He talked about treatment options, timelines, percentages of success and failure.

This is an advanced form of liver cancer and it is Stage IV.

There is less than a 5% chance of survival. 5% is something I suppose. But I'm not optimistic of beating those odds.

It's more about buying time. There's a chance this can halt the progression for a few months. And for now, I'm willing to take that.

My father and my pack have been manipulated by Aaron and the events he set in motion forced my father to take his own life.

There has to be reparation for this.

Aaron can not get away with what he did.

I'm going to undergo treatment because I need to live long enough to make Aaron pay.

My brother sits at my bedside. "The pack wants to conduct the ceremony to bury father. I told them to go ahead and make the arrangements."

"When?"

"Tonight."

That doesn't leave much time. The sun is already setting. "You should head home then, to prepare."

Liam nods. He squeezes my hand for a moment. "I'm sorry, Leah. About all of this." He means the cancer too. "We can try and turn you..."

"You heard what Adam said after the oncologist left. I'm not strong enough to survive it." And I think he's right. I feel so

weak. "If this treatment works, if it pushes the disease back, then, yes. I will undergo the ritual and be thankful for it."

He grimaces. Because even though he proposes that I undergo the transformation, that's not to say that it will work either.

Even for the healthiest of humans, only a handful have been successfully 'turned'.

It's a death sentence, more than likely.

"Go home. The pack's bound to be in an uproar. They need you there."

He nods. "I'll come back for you well before midnight. Or I'll send someone."

"Thank you."

I don't want to miss the funeral ceremony.

"For what it's worth, I'm sorry, Leah."

"How long have you known that my marriage isn't valid?" I ask him. I've lived among Aaron's pack for a decade and it's news to

I wonder who else knows. My gods, Aaron has made a fool of

"I only just discovered it." He stares at where he holds my hand. "I should've done something. I shouldn't have let father pledge

you in the first place. All those years ago, we should've found another way."

I swallow hard. "It's in the past."

And really, it doesn't matter now. But memories surface. Of calling my dad and Liam, begging them to let me come back home. I'd been an angry, scared, heartbroken thirteen year old girl. And though I begged and pleaded that I missed them and needed them...

My dad said no. I needed to do my part for the pack.

Then neither he nor my brother accepted my calls for almost a year.

I force a smile. "You're a good man and you'll make a great Alpha. Don't waste your time here. Pack comes first."

"Always," he agrees.

Which makes me think, he might talk about feeling bad about my marriage to Aaron, but if he'd been in my father's shoes, he would've done the same damn thing.

Chapter 39

LEAH

I'm cold.

I'm sure it's due in part to the treatment, but the icy feeling sets in and no number of blankets can disperse the chill.

They gave me valium. Probably a higher dose than they

normally would, because in Adam's words, "you need to rest and your body's too stressed."

Now that's an understatement.

Adam has checked in a few times, and I sense that at least a portion of the people employed at this clinic are actually wolves.

There's some comfort in that.

Dr. Henley came in too, once or twice to touch base with me.

I appreciate the familiar faces.

It's not quite 7pm and I have time to rest before going to the funeral. That will happen at midnight and they'll burn my father's body before spreading the ashes on his lands. Then his pack will run and the power will transition to my brother.

There's a chance that another wolf might try to challenge him, but Liam doesn't seem concerned.

He's grown into a powerful man and he is very intelligent.

I trust that if he can't overpower, then he'll be able to outwit an opponent.

Unless it's Aaron.

The thought comes unbidden and I shiver.

I don't want to think about him. Or all the lies and deceit.

I suppose there is a chance that he'll use his bond to me to try

and claim control. But Liam assured me that one of the first things he did upon dad's death was to declare the blood debt over and to vow to get me back.

And my pack supported the decision.

But that still makes me a liability.

Until my marriage is officially over, declared null and void by the High Council, then Aaron can use me to get to my family.

When my hospital room door opens I look up, expecting a nurse or physician or maybe Adam. He's really been hovering over me.

But..."Brian!"

Brian Leithrow strolls into the room with his hands in his pockets. "Hello Leah."

His blond hair is a little long and his beard is trim. He looks a lot like Chris Helmsworth in his Thor years, and whenever this wolf visited Aaron's lands, you could all but hear the females swooning in his wake.

"Brian, what are you doing here?"

"You don't look so good, kid."

"You're like six years older than me." I sigh. "Isn't it bad manners to tell a girl they don't look good?"

"Okay, you look tired, then."

I snort. "Same thing."

He sits at the foot of the bed and I shift my leg over to make more room for him. "I'm sorry about your father," he says.

I nod. I can't even believe my father is really gone. It'll take time to process that, I imagine.

"I can take you away from all of this, Leah," he says softly.

Chapter 40

Take me away?

"I'm sorry," I say. "I think I'm just surprised to see you." I still don't know how he even knew to find me here. I haven't seen this man or spoken to him in years. "What do you mean, 'take me away?'" I ask.

He shrugs. "I'm thinking you might want to not be fought over like a scrap of meat for a while."

He's strong and handsome, and, I suspect, very accustomed to getting what he wants, at least from females. "But why? Why me?"

His smile is lopsided and amused. "You have to know that I always had a crush on you."

What? No.

This is absolutely news to me.

"Aaron had told that I was...drawn to you. It's why you haven't seen me at his pack in recent years. It caused a rift."

I rub my eyes. "I'm sorry. I'm having a hard time keeping up with all of this. And seeing you out of the blue, it's a shock. A nice one. But...it's been a minute."

"Yes, and I've shared too much, I think." He grins again. "But I'm not shy. And I know he never valued you. Not the way he should have, anyway."

It's true Brian came around a lot, but those visits stopped shortly after I married Aaron. Can it be what he claims?

I asked Aaron once, what happened to Brian because he used to hang out and be a fixture within our pack, but Aaron refused to talk about it.

"I heard about what happened at the Council meeting."

Okay. That explains the timing, I guess. Or at least why he might seek me out. But I'm still not clear on how he knew to find me. Here. In a hospital.

"So what do you say, want to break out of here for a bit?" he asks

My thoughts are all over the place, but I try to stay focused on the conversation. "My father's funeral is tonight."

"I've heard." He nods. "Let me escort you. You shouldn't go alone and it will make a statement if you are there with me."

It's petty. But I like what he's thinking.

Aaron is a proud man.

And it would serve him right for packs to gossip about me with another male. It's not like they haven't been gossiping about him

and Jessica all these years...

"So," he prompts. "What do you say?"

Chapter 40



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"Aaron had told that I was...drawn to you. It's why you haven't seen me at his pack in recent years. It caused a rift."

I rub my eyes. "I'm sorry. I'm having a hard time keeping up with all of this. And seeing you out of the blue, it's a shock. A nice one. But...it's been a minute."

"Yes, and I've shared too much, I think." He grins again. "But I'm not shy. And I know he never valued you. Not the way he should have, anyway."

It's true Brian came around a lot, but those visits stopped shortly after I married Aaron. Can it be what he claims?

I asked Aaron once, what happened to Brian because he used to hang out and be a fixture within our pack, but Aaron refused to talk about it.

"I heard about what happened at the Council meeting."

Okay. That explains the timing, I guess. Or at least why he might seek me out. But I'm still not clear on how he knew to find me. Here. In a hospital.

"So what do you say, want to break out of here for a bit?" he asks

My thoughts are all over the place, but I try to stay focused on the conversation. "My father's funeral is tonight."

"I've heard." He nods. "Let me escort you. You shouldn't go alone and it will make a statement if you are there with me."

It's petty. But I like what he's thinking.

Aaron is a proud man.

And it would serve him right for packs to gossip about me with another male. It's not like they haven't been gossiping about him

and Jessica all these years...

“So,” he prompts. “What do you say?”