

Chapter 3: Shattered Bonds

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(Olivia's POV)

Ethan seemed to nally realize his girlfriend was still present. As if waking from a trance, he withdrew the arm that had been wrapped around Cassandra's waist and took two steps back.

His friends, sensing the tension in the air, hurried to smooth things over.

"Let's switch to Truth or Dare!" Jason Mitchell suggested loudly, clapping his hands to draw attention away from the awkward scene.

Ethan regained his composure and returned to his seat beside me. From the corner of my eye, I could see him watching me carefully, clearly expecting a jealous outburst or tears.

I remained silent, sipping my drink with calm indifference.

"Aren't you going to say anything?" he nally whispered, his voice tense.

I turned to him, my amber eyes reecting nothing but cool detachment. "About what?"

For the rst time since I'd known him, Ethan looked genuinely unsettled. His brow furrowed as he studied my face, searching for the emotional, accommodating girlfriend he was used to manipulating.

"You're acting strange tonight," he muttered, shifting uncomfortably in his seat.

I simply smiled and turned my attention back to the game. My wolf, Cora, purred with satisfaction inside me, pleased that we were nally standing our ground.

The group's attention quickly shifted to Cassandra, who had become the center of the circle. Her laughter rang out as she tossed back another drink, ignoring Ethan's earlier warning.

"Your turn again, Cass!" Sophie called out, her voice overly bright. "You lost this round!"

Cassandra's eyes sparkled mischievously. "I choose dare," she announced, her gaze provocatively sweeping over Ethan.

Sophie reached into a bowl and drew out a slip of paper. Her eyes widened slightly as she read it. "Randomly kiss a man here."

Shocked murmurs rippled through the room. The temperature seemed to plummet as Ethan's expression grew frigid.

Yet Cassandra smiled, clearly enjoying the attention. She stood up slowly, making a show of considering her options.

"Who shall it be?" she teased, her eyes lingering on Ethan before deliberately moving away.

To everyone's surprise, she sauntered toward Lucas Bennett, a handsome but timid young man from Ethan's inner circle. Poor Lucas froze like a deer in headlights as Cassandra approached.

"Don't worry," she whispered loud enough for everyone to hear. "I don't bite... much."

Before Lucas could react, Cassandra looped her arms around his neck. His face paled dramatically as he shot a panicked glance toward Ethan.

"ENOUGH!"

Ethan's roar lled the room with such dominance that everyone instinctively lowered their gaze. Even I felt Cora shrink back slightly at the raw power in his voice.

He stormed across the room in three long strides, grabbing Cassandra's arm and pulling her away from Lucas, who looked ready to faint with relief.

"This game is over," Ethan growled, his ice-blue eyes blazing with fury.

Without another word, he dragged Cassandra out of the private room, slamming the door behind them.

The silence that followed was deafening. Then, slowly, all eyes turned to me.

I quietly sipped my wine, forcing my face to remain neutral despite the ice forming in my chest. Three years of love, shattered in a single evening.

"Why are you all looking at me?" I asked softly, my voice steady despite the storm raging inside.

Sophie approached cautiously. "Liv, are you okay?"

I smiled gently, though my heart was freezing bit by bit. "Of course. Why wouldn't I be?"

I nished my drink in one smooth motion and stood up. "Excuse me, I need to use the restroom."

As I walked away, I could hear their whispers following me like shadows.

In the elegant bathroom, I locked myself in a stall and leaned against the door, nally allowing my smile to drop. I took several deep breaths, refusing to cry.

"Did you see Ethan's face?" A voice suddenly echoed in the bathroom. I froze, recognizing Victoria Reed's distinctive tone.

"I know! He looked ready to tear Lucas apart," another girl replied with a giggle.

"Ethan's gone completely crazy, abandoning his girlfriend to chase after Cassandra," Victoria continued, her voice dripping with malicious delight.

"Obviously, he only cares about Cassandra," someone else chimed in. "The way he watches her every move... it's like no one else exists."

"Poor Olivia, just standing there watching her boyfriend go mad over another woman."

Victoria's voice lowered conspiratorially. "She's just a stand-in. Anyone can tell Ethan's heart only responds to Cassandra."

Their words cut through me like silver blades, but I straightened my shoulders. I'd heard enough.

I ushed the toilet and stepped out of the stall. The girls by the sink caught sight of me in the mirror and fell abruptly silent, their faces draining of color.

Without acknowledging them, I calmly washed my hands, my reection composed despite the turmoil inside. The girls hurried away with bowed heads, not daring to meet my eyes.

Alone at last, I stared at my reection. Yes, our breakup was inevitable—not because Ethan no longer wanted me, but because I no longer wanted him.

"Not that I don't love him anymore," I whispered to myself, "but that I refuse to love a man who never truly saw me as his true partner."

Cora growled in agreement, her presence warm and supportive within me.

I returned to the party only long enough to say my goodbyes, ignoring the pitying glances that followed me out the door.

Late that night, I returned alone to Moonlight Manor, exhausted from maintaining my composure for hours. Martha greeted me with concern in her eyes, but I reassured her with a smile that didn't reach my eyes.

"Is everything alright, Miss Winters?" she asked gently.

"Just tired, Martha. Good night."

After a hot shower, I collapsed into bed, my heart numb and heavy. Sleep came quickly, a merciful escape from reality.

It wasn't until the following afternoon that Ethan returned. I was already up, methodically packing my belongings when I heard the front door open.

The moment he entered the bedroom, I detected Cassandra's perfume clinging to his clothes. There were also faint marks on his neck that he hadn't bothered to hide.

"What are you doing?" he asked with surprise, staring at the open suitcase on the oor.

I poked my head out from behind the wardrobe and answered casually, "You're back. I'm planning to visit my father in Riverdale in a few days."

I continued sorting through my belongings, determined not to leave a single trace behind when I left. My eyes bried caught the ambiguous marks on his neck, but I looked away without comment.

My heart had already died; his affairs no longer concerned me.

Ethan frowned, moving closer. "Why suddenly go back home? Still mad about last night? Hiding from me?"

"No," I replied gently, keeping my amber eyes carefully blank, "I just miss my father."

(Ethan's POV)

Hearing her calm response, I visibly relaxed. So she wasn't upset about Cassandra after all. This was why I appreciated Olivia—she never made scenes or demanded explanations.

"That's good then," I said, watching her fold her clothes with meticulous care.

In the past three years, Olivia had never once returned to Riverdale, even spending holidays alone in Harbor City. I had never brought her home to meet my mother, knowing Margaret Grey would never accept a woman from a low-ranking family.

To my relief, Olivia never insisted on meeting my family or formalizing our relationship. How obedient and sensible she was, I thought to myself.

"How long will you be gone?" I asked, sitting on the edge of the bed.

She continued folding her favorite blue sweater, placing it neatly in her suitcase. "I'm not sure yet. It depends on how things go with my father."

"No need to trouble you, I'll arrange my own ride," she added, not looking up from her task. "Someone will pick me up."

I secretly breathed easier, glad not to have to deal with crossing into Winters territory. As the only Alpha heir of the Grey pack, I knew a future with her was impossible.

I had never heard Olivia talk about her family background. She was usually short of money and must be from a low-ranking family. Such a family would be of no help to the Grey pack.

Even if my wolf had decided that Olivia was my mate, I would not let such a low-ranking female wolf become the future Luna of the Grey pack. Our social divide was an unbridgeable chasm.

I watched her carefully handling each item, her movements precise and emotionless. Something about her demeanor bothered me, but I couldn't quite place it.

Inwardly, I recalled Jason's advice from last night: "Just keep seeing both women. If you feel guilty, buy Olivia some gifts. Women are easy to please."

Maybe, I thought, I could marry Cassandra and keep Olivia as my girlfriend. Surely, she loved me too much to leave. When she returned from Riverdale, I would talk to her about it.

I softened my voice: "Be safe on the road. Let me know when you arrive. When you come back to Harbor City, I'll pick you up."

(Olivia's POV)

I lowered my eyes and replied quietly, "Okay."

But in my heart, I whispered, I won't be coming back.

Ethan's phone rang, interrupting the silence. He checked the screen and immediately stood up.

"I have to go out for a bit," he said after a brief call. "Last night was my fault. I shouldn't have left you there alone."

He hesitated, then added, "I bought you a healing broth mix; Martha will bring it over later."

"Thank you," I answered coolly, my tone indifferent.

Without another word, Ethan turned and left the manor, too preoccupied to notice the nality in my expression.

I continued packing, carefully removing every trace of my existence from his life. Three years reduced to a few suitcases.

Not long after he departed, my phone chimed with a message. I picked it up to see Connor Rivers' name on the screen.