

SHATTERED BONDS: THE OMEGA'S RECKONING

Chapter 1 - THE PUNISHMENT ROOM

Wren POV

The smell of my own blood wakes me up.

I'm lying on cold concrete in the basement again. My face is pressed against the floor, and something wet and sticky pools under my cheek. I try to move, but pain explodes through my chest like someone's stabbing me with a thousand knives.

Broken ribs. Again.

I count them carefully, breathing shallow so it doesn't hurt as much. One. Two. Three. Three broken ribs this time. Last month it was just two. I'm getting worse at protecting myself, or Dax is getting better at breaking me.

Probably both.

I push myself up slowly, biting my lip so hard I taste new blood. Can't scream. If I scream, someone might come down here, and that someone will make things worse. The basement of the Ravencrest pack house is where they put me when I'm "being punished." Which is basically every day.

Today's my birthday. I'm nineteen years old.

I should be celebrating. Normal nineteen-year-old wolves are probably at parties right now, dancing with their friends, maybe meeting their fated mates. But I'm not normal. I don't have a wolf yet, which makes me the freak of the pack. The defective one. The girl who should've shifted at thirteen like everyone else but didn't.

The girl who's still waiting.

My parents used to tell me I was special. That was before they died six years ago, before the rogues attacked them on the highway and tore them apart. I was thirteen when Alpha Corbin Ravencrest found me crying over their bodies. He promised he'd take care of me.

He lied.

The Ravencrests didn't take care of me. They made me their slave. Their omega. The lowest of the low. And Alpha Corbin's triplet sons—Dax, Flynn, and Kade—made me their personal punching bag.

I touch my ribs gently, wincing. This time it was Dax. He's the oldest triplet by four minutes, and he likes to remind everyone by being the strongest, the meanest, the one who hits the hardest. Yesterday, I made the mistake of looking at him during dinner. Just looked at him. He said my eyes were disrespectful.

He threw me down the stairs.

I remember falling, my body hitting each step, the crack-crack-crack of bones breaking. I remember landing at the bottom and seeing his face looking down at me from the top. He wasn't even sorry. He just smiled and walked away.

Flynn probably would've burned me for looking. He likes fire, likes watching skin blister. Kade wouldn't have hit me at all. He's the "nice" one. He would've just said something cruel, something that cuts deeper than any punch, and made me feel like I deserved to be thrown down the stairs.

I hate them. I hate all three of them.

But tonight, I'm finally leaving.

I crawl across the basement floor to the corner where they keep the old boxes. My whole body screams with every movement, but I don't stop. Under a loose floorboard behind the boxes is my escape bag. I've been packing it for three months, stealing little things whenever I can. A jacket from the donation pile. Dried meat from the kitchen. A knife from the garden shed.

Twenty dollars I found in the trash.

My fingers find the loose board and I pry it up. The bag is still there, dusty but safe. I pull it out and hug it to my chest, even though it makes my ribs hurt worse.

Tonight is the shift ceremony. The whole pack will be there, watching me stand in the center of the circle under the full moon. They'll watch me fail to shift again, because that's what everyone expects. The wolfless freak, failing one more time.

But this year, I'm not sticking around for the shame. The moment the ceremony ends, I'm running. I'll head north, cross the border into the Northern Crescent pack territory. I don't know if they'll take me in, but anywhere is better than here.

I'm putting the floorboard back when I hear footsteps on the stairs.

My heart stops.

The basement door opens, light flooding down. I shove the bag back under the board and push the boxes in front of it, moving as fast as my broken body will let me. I'm back

in the center of the floor, trying to look like I've been lying here the whole time, when someone reaches the bottom of the stairs.

It's Kade.

He's wearing his usual perfect clothes, his ash-brown hair styled perfectly, his gray eyes cold as he looks at me. The "nice" triplet. The one who never gets his hands dirty.

"Get up," he says. His voice is calm, almost bored. "Mother wants you presentable for the ceremony tonight. The whole pack will be watching."

I don't move fast enough.

Kade walks over and grabs my arm, yanking me to my feet. Pain shoots through my chest and I gasp. He hears it and lets go immediately, stepping back like I'm diseased.

"Three ribs?" he asks, tilting his head. "Dax doesn't know his own strength."

"Please," I whisper. "I just need a few more minutes—"

"You've had all night." He turns toward the stairs. "Be in the main hall in ten minutes. If you embarrass this pack tonight, Dax's punishment will feel like a gentle hug compared to what's coming."

He leaves.

I stand there shaking, holding my ribs, trying not to cry. Ten minutes. I have ten minutes to get upstairs, get cleaned up, and prepare for the ceremony that will decide everything.

I take one step toward the stairs when something weird happens.

Heat floods through my body. Not painful heat like Flynn's fire. This is different. It's coming from inside me, spreading through my chest, down my arms, into my legs. My skin starts to tingle. My bones feel strange, like they're shifting under my skin.

No.

No, this can't be happening now.

I look down at my hands and watch in horror as my fingers start to change. My nails are getting longer, sharper. My skin is rippling like there's something moving underneath it.

After six years of waiting, after six years of being called defective and worthless and broken, my wolf is finally coming.

And she's not coming during the ceremony where it's safe.

She's coming right now, in the basement, where no one can help me.

The pain hits me like a hammer and I scream.