

SHATTERED BONDS: THE OMEGA'S RECKONING

Chapter 3 - THE SHIFT CEREMONY

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Wren POV

I wake up in a cage.

Not a real cage—worse. I'm in the center of the ceremonial circle with three hundred pack members surrounding me, and every single one of them is staring. Waiting for me to fail. Again.

My shift in the basement stopped as suddenly as it started. One minute I was screaming, feeling my bones break and reform, and the next minute everything just... stopped. Like my wolf changed her mind. Like even she knew I wasn't ready.

Kade found me passed out on the basement floor an hour later. He didn't ask questions. Just dragged me upstairs, threw me in a cold shower, and shoved these rags at me. Now here I am, standing under the full moon in clothes that are basically falling apart, about to give the pack their favorite show.

Watching Wren the Freak fail one more time.

"SILENCE!" Alpha Corbin's voice booms across the circle. The crowd goes quiet instantly. He's standing on the raised platform with Luna Saskia beside him, and the triplets flanking them like deadly statues.

Dax catches my eye and smirks. Even from here, I can see the satisfaction on his face. He's probably remembering yesterday, remembering how good it felt to throw me down those stairs.

I hope I never see him again after tonight.

"We gather under the full moon," Alpha Corbin continues, "to witness Wren Hathaway's shift ceremony. Her nineteenth attempt."

Laughter ripples through the crowd. Someone yells, "Wolfless freak!" Someone else shouts, "Just banish her already!"

My face burns, but I keep my chin up. Just a few more hours. Survive this, then run.

"Wren." Alpha Corbin looks down at me with cold eyes. "Step forward."

I walk to the center of the circle on shaking legs. My ribs are screaming with every step—Dax's gift that keeps on giving. The crowd presses closer, their eyes hungry for my failure.

This is it. My last night in this pack. My last night being their punching bag.

Suddenly, Dax jumps down from the platform and strides toward me. The crowd parts for him like water. He's massive, built like a warrior, and right now his golden Alpha eyes are locked on me like I'm prey.

He stops inches away. "Let's watch her fail," he announces loudly, then shoves me hard in the chest.

I stumble backward, barely catching myself before I fall. My ribs scream. The crowd laughs.

"Pathetic," Dax sneers, loud enough for everyone to hear. "Can't even stand up straight."

I bite my tongue so hard I taste blood. Don't react. Don't give them the satisfaction.

Alpha Corbin raises his hands. "Let the ceremony begin. Wren Hathaway, call upon your wolf. Shift under the light of our Moon Goddess."

I close my eyes.

Please, I pray silently. Moon Goddess, if you're listening, I don't need a wolf. I just need strength to run. Strength to make it to the border. Strength to survive.

The crowd starts counting down. "Ten... nine... eight..."

I can feel their excitement building. They want me to fail. They need me to fail so they can feel better about themselves.

"Five... four... three..."

My escape bag is hidden in the woods just past the eastern border. If I run fast enough, I can grab it and disappear before anyone catches me.

"Two... one..."

Nothing happens.

The crowd erupts in jeers and laughter. "She failed again!" "Wolfless!" "Defective!"

I open my eyes, ready to run, ready to leave this nightmare behind forever—

And that's when the pain hits.

It's not like the basement. This is a thousand times worse. Fire explodes through my veins, burning me from the inside out. Every bone in my body starts breaking at once—crack, crack, crack—snapping like dry twigs.

I scream.

The crowd goes silent.

My skin ripples and tears. My spine curves and stretches. My hands hit the ground, but they're not hands anymore—they're paws, massive and silver-white.

"Impossible," someone whispers.

The shift takes me like a storm. I can't control it, can't stop it. My wolf is coming whether I'm ready or not, and she's coming fast and violent and powerful.

More bones break. More skin tears. I'm screaming but the sound coming out isn't human anymore—it's a howl that shakes the ground beneath us.

Then suddenly, everything stops.

The pain vanishes like someone flipped a switch. I'm standing on four legs instead of two. My vision is sharper, my hearing is clearer, and I can smell everything—the fear in the crowd, the shock radiating from the platform, the absolute disbelief coming from everyone.

I did it.

After six years, I finally shifted.

Someone gasps. "Look at her wolf!"

I look down at my paws and freeze. They're huge. Way bigger than they should be. And they're glowing silver-white under the moonlight, like I'm made of starlight.

"Silver wolf," Alpha Corbin breathes. "That's impossible. Silver wolves haven't existed for centuries."

The crowd starts murmuring, their jeers turning to confused whispers. I can hear fragments of conversation: "...so powerful..." "...never seen anything like..." "...she was hiding it..."

Then something else happens.

Three golden threads suddenly snap into existence in my chest, burning like fire, connecting me to... someone. Three someones. The threads are so bright they're blinding, pulling tight like they're trying to drag me somewhere.

My wolf—Nyx, I realize her name is Nyx—speaks for the first time in my head. Her voice is ancient and powerful and absolutely certain.

MATES, she growls. *Found our mates.*

No. No, that's impossible.

But I follow the golden threads with my eyes, tracing them across the circle, and my heart drops into my stomach.

All three threads lead to the platform.

To Dax. To Flynn. To Kade.

The triplets who've tortured me for six years are my fated mates.

All three of them.

Nyx howls with joy inside my head, but I feel like I'm dying. The mate bond is supposed to be beautiful, supposed to be perfect. But looking at them now, I don't see potential mates. I see my abusers. My torturers. The boys who broke me piece by piece.

I wait for them to feel it too. Wait for their eyes to light up with recognition, for them to smile, for something to change.

But Dax looks disgusted. Flynn looks confused. And Kade just stares at me like I'm something he stepped in.

They don't feel the bond.

They don't know I'm their mate.

And from the hatred burning in their eyes, they never want to.

"Kill it!" Luna Saskia's scream shatters the moment. She's pointing at me with a shaking hand. "That's not natural! That thing isn't one of us! KILL IT!"

Dax shifts instantly, his massive black wolf emerging in a blur of fur and rage.

And he's running straight at me.