

# SHATTERED BONDS: THE OMEGA'S RECKONING

## Chapter 5 - THE NORTHERN BORDER

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*Wren POV*

I'm dying and my body won't let me forget it.

Every step I take in wolf form sends fresh pain shooting through my side where Dax's claws tore me open. Blood drips from the wound, leaving a trail through the forest that anyone could follow. But I keep moving because stopping means dying, and I didn't survive six years of torture just to die in the woods like an animal.

Well, I am an animal now. A wolf. A silver wolf, apparently, though I still don't understand what that means.

What I do understand is that I need to run.

My wolf Nyx whimpers inside my head. She's weak from the shift, confused by everything that happened. But mostly she's heartbroken.

*Mates rejected us, she keeps whispering. Mates hurt us.*

The three golden bonds in my chest are on fire. They're pulling tight, trying to drag me back toward the Ravencrest territory, back toward Dax and Flynn and Kade. The mate bonds want me to return to them, to find them, to complete the connection.

But they don't want me.

That's the part that makes no sense. Mate bonds are supposed to work both ways. When two wolves are fated mates, they both feel it instantly. The pull should be equal, the recognition immediate.

So why did I feel the bonds snap into place while they looked at me with disgust?

Why does my chest burn with connection while Dax literally tried to kill me?

Something's wrong. Something's broken. Either with me, or with them, or with the Moon Goddess herself.

I stumble over a root and crash to the ground, my injured side screaming. Get up, I tell myself. Get up or die here.

I force myself back onto four legs and keep going.

The forest gets thicker. Darker. I can hear water ahead—a river, hopefully. Rivers mean borders. Rivers mean escape.

Behind me, I hear howls. The Ravencrest pack is hunting me.

Terror gives me strength I didn't know I had. I push harder, running faster despite the pain, despite the blood loss, despite everything. The howls get closer. They're going to catch me. They're going to drag me back and finish what Dax started.

The river appears between the trees—wide and fast-moving, the water black under the moonlight.

I don't hesitate. I jump.

The cold water hits me like a slap. My wolf form isn't built for swimming, especially not with a gaping wound in my side, but I paddle desperately toward the opposite bank. The current tries to drag me downstream. My muscles scream. My vision blurs.

The mate bonds in my chest pulse with pain, begging me to turn back.

Never, I think. I'd rather drown than go back to them.

My paws finally hit solid ground on the opposite bank. I drag myself out of the water, coughing and shaking. Every part of me hurts. The wound in my side is bleeding worse now, the water washing away what little clotting had started.

I shift back to human without meaning to—Nyx is too weak to hold our wolf form anymore. Suddenly I'm naked and bleeding on a riverbank in unfamiliar territory, and I can't even stand up.

This is it. This is where I die.

At least I made it across the border. At least I'm not dying in Ravencrest territory.

Voices shout in the distance. Footsteps crash through the underbrush. I try to crawl away but my body won't cooperate anymore.

Wolves emerge from the trees—huge wolves, bigger than any I've seen, with fur ranging from black to gray to brown. They surround me in seconds, forming a circle with me at the center.

Just like the ceremony. Just like every nightmare I've ever had.

I curl into a ball, trying to protect my vital organs, waiting for the attack.

But it doesn't come.

Instead, the wolves shift to human form—men and women, all watching me with careful eyes. They're not attacking. They're... guarding me? Protecting me from something?

"Stand down," a voice commands, and everyone goes still. "She's injured."

A man pushes through the circle of wolves. Even injured and dying, I can tell he's important. He moves like power itself, like the forest bends around him just because he exists.

He's also the most beautiful person I've ever seen.

Platinum hair that almost glows in the moonlight. Ice-blue eyes that seem to see right through me. A face carved from stone and starlight. He's tall, built like a warrior, and completely naked like everyone else who just shifted, but somehow it doesn't seem wrong on him.

He kneels beside me, and I flinch backward.

"Easy," he says softly. "I'm not going to hurt you."

"Please," I whisper, my voice breaking. "Please don't send me back."

His eyes flash amber—his wolf rising to the surface. "Send you back where?"

"Ravencrest. They'll kill me. Please, I'll do anything, just don't—"

"Never," he interrupts, and the word is a promise. "You're in Northern Crescent territory now. Under my protection."

He reaches for me and I try to pull away, but I'm too weak. His arms slide under my knees and shoulders, lifting me like I weigh nothing. The movement makes my wound scream and I gasp.

"Sorry," he murmurs. "We need to get you to the healers. You're losing too much blood."

I look up at his face, trying to focus through the pain. "Who are you?"

His lips curve into a small smile. "Alpha King Thorne Ashford. And you are?"

"Wren," I manage. "Just Wren."

"Well, Just Wren, you're safe now. I promise."

Something about his voice makes me believe him. Or maybe I'm just desperate to believe anyone who isn't trying to kill me.

The mate bonds in my chest suddenly flare with intense pain, so bad I cry out. Thorne's grip tightens on me, careful not to jostle my wound.

"What is it?" he asks urgently.

"The bonds," I gasp. "They're pulling. They want me to go back."

His eyes narrow. "You're bonded? To whom?"

I don't want to tell him. Don't want to admit that the Moon Goddess gave me three fated mates who hate me. But the words spill out anyway, maybe because I'm dying, maybe because I need someone to understand.

"The Alpha's sons. The triplets. Dax, Flynn, and Kade." Tears stream down my face. "They're my mates. All three of them. But they can't feel it. They don't know. And they tried to kill me anyway."

The expression that crosses Thorne's face is terrifying—pure rage mixed with something that looks like satisfaction.

"The Ravencrest heirs," he says slowly, "hurt their own fated mate?"

"They didn't know," I whisper, defending them even though they don't deserve it. "Something's blocking the bond on their side. They can't feel what I feel."

Thorne starts walking, carrying me through the forest with his warriors following. "That's impossible. Mate bonds can't be one-sided."

"I know. But mine is."

He looks down at me, and something in his eyes makes my heart skip. "Then someone cursed it. Someone wanted you dead before they could recognize you."

The words hit me like cold water. A curse. That would explain everything—why I shifted so late, why the bond only works one way, why I've been so weak for so long.

"Who would curse me?" I ask.

"Someone who feared what you'd become." His voice is gentle now. "Because you're not just any wolf, Wren. You're a silver wolf. Do you know what that means?"

I shake my head weakly.

"It means you're special. Powerful. Rare." He adjusts his grip on me as we walk. "It means whoever cursed you was terrified of what you'd do once you came into your power."

My vision is fading, darkness creeping in from the edges. I'm losing too much blood. I won't last much longer.

"Stay with me," Thorne commands, his voice cutting through the fog. "Don't you dare die, little wolf. Not when you've finally escaped."

"Tired," I mumble. "So tired."

"I know. But you have to fight. Just a little longer."

The last thing I see before darkness takes me is his ice-blue eyes staring down at me with an intensity that burns.

And the last thing I hear is his voice, low and fierce and full of promise:

"They threw you away like garbage. But I'm going to show you exactly how precious you really are. And then, little wolf, we're going to make them regret ever touching you."