

9 TRAINING BEGINS

Wren POV 1

"Absolutely not!" I'm backing away from Thorne like he just suggested I jump off a cliff. "I'm not going out there!"

"You need to face them eventually," Thorne says calmly. He's standing between me and the door, blocking my escape route. "They're not leaving until they see you."

"Then let them wait forever!" My voice cracks. The mate bonds in my chest are on fire, pulling so hard I can barely breathe. Kade's voice is still echoing across the territory: *We're sorry! We didn't know! Come back!*

But all I can think about is Dax's claws tearing through my side. Flynn's satisfied smile when he burned my hands. Kade's cold eyes as he told me I was worthless.

"They hurt me," I whisper. "For six years. Every single day. And now they want me back because some curse broke and they finally feel what I've been feeling alone?"

Thorne's expression softens. "I know. And you don't have to forgive them. Ever. But right now, we need to show them you're under my protection. That you're not the broken omega

they remember."

"But I am broken—"

"No." He steps closer, his ice-blue eyes intense.

"You're healing. There's a difference. And the best way to heal is to become stronger than the people who hurt you."

Something about his words makes my spine straighten. Stronger. I've never been strong before. Never been anything but weak and scared and waiting to get hurt again.

Maybe it's time to change that.

"What do you want me to do?" I ask.

Thorne's smile is fierce. "I want you to shift. Show them your wolf. Show them what they threw away."

Twenty minutes later, I'm standing in the training grounds with fifty Northern Crescent wolves watching me. My legs are shaking. My heart is trying to escape through my throat.

"You can do this," Piper whispers beside me.

"Just breathe and let Nyx out."

I close my eyes and reach for my wolf. Nyx is there immediately, eager and excited.

Show them, she growls. Show them we're not weak anymore.

The shift comes easier this time. My bones break and reform but it doesn't hurt as much—more like stretching sore muscles. My skin ripples and silver fur bursts through. When I open my eyes again, I'm on four legs and the world is sharper, clearer, more alive.

The Northern Crescent wolves gasp. Even though they've heard about my silver wolf, seeing her is different.

I'm huge. Bigger than any female wolf should be. My fur glows like moonlight, and when I move, power rolls off me in waves.

For the first time in my life, I feel strong.

Thorne shifts beside me—his ice-white wolf is massive, built like a warrior, with eyes that glow amber. He's beautiful and terrifying at the same time.

Run with me, he says in wolf-speak, and I understand him perfectly.

We run.

It's nothing like running from danger, running from pain. This is running for joy. Nyx is fast—faster than I dreamed possible. We tear through the forest, Thorne keeping pace beside me. The pack follows but we're leading, and it feels incredible.

When we finally stop at a cliff overlooking the northern territory, I shift back to human. Thorne does the same.

"How do you feel?" he asks.

"Strong," I admit, surprised by my own voice.

"Really strong."

"Good. Because you need to understand something, Wren." He turns to face me fully. "The Ravenscrests tortured you. But why? Why target one orphan girl? Why spend six years breaking someone they thought was wolfless omega?"

I've never really thought about it. "Because they're cruel?"

"They're cruel to lots of people. But you they specifically targeted. You they kept close. They could've banished you years ago but they didn't." His eyes narrow. "Someone wanted you there. Someone wanted you weak and broken and suffering."

The pieces start clicking together. "The curse. Piper said someone cursed my shift, blocked the mate bonds..."

"Your parents died when you were thirteen. In a 'car accident.'" Thorne makes air quotes. "What if it wasn't an accident? What if someone killed them and then cursed you to make sure you never became what you were meant to be?"

My stomach drops. "An Apex Luna."

"Exactly. Someone knew what you were. Knew you'd be powerful. So they eliminated your parents and placed you with their enemies—the Ravenscrests—knowing those boys would torture you without realizing you were their fated mate."

I sink to the ground, my legs giving out. "That's... that's evil."

"That's calculated." Thorne kneels beside me.

"Someone orchestrated your entire life to destroy you. And I want to know who."

"Why do you care?" The question bursts out.

"You want revenge on the Ravenscrests. I'm just a weapon for that."

"At first, yes," he admits. "But Wren, you're not just some broken girl anymore. You're Apex Luna. You're powerful. And someone is very afraid of what you'll become." He extends his hand. "Stay here. Train with me. Learn to use your power. And then we find whoever destroyed your life and we make them pay."

I stare at his hand. Six years ago, I would've been too scared to take it. Too convinced I didn't deserve help, didn't deserve anything except pain.

But I'm not that girl anymore.

I take his hand. "Okay. I'll stay. I'll train."

"And the Ravencrests?"

The mate bonds pulse with longing, begging me to go to them. But my mind is clearer now.

"They had six years to treat me like a person. Six years to show even basic kindness. The curse didn't make them cruel—it just blocked them from knowing I was their mate. Everything they did, they did by choice." I meet Thorne's eyes. "So no. I'm not going back to them. Ever."

His smile is approving. "Good. Now let's go tell them that."

We shift back to wolf form and run to the northern border where the Ravencrests are waiting. I can see them through the trees—Dax, Flynn, Kade, all in human form, pacing like caged animals. Luna Saskia stands behind them holding something wrapped in silver cloth.

The moment they see my silver wolf emerge from the trees with Thorne beside me, everything stops.

"Wren," Dax breathes, and the sound of my name in his voice makes the mate bonds scream.

I shift to human, standing naked but unashamed. Let them see the scars they gave me. Let them see what they did.

"You need to come home," Kade says, stepping

forward. "We know now. We feel the bonds. You're our mate—"

"I know what I am," I interrupt. My voice is steady. Strong. "I've known since the shift ceremony. I felt the bonds snap into place while you looked at me with disgust."

Flynn flinches. "We didn't know—"

"You didn't care," I correct. "Mate bond or not, I was a person. I deserved basic kindness. You gave me six years of torture instead."

"The curse blocked us," Dax argues desperately. "We couldn't feel—"

"The curse blocked recognition. Not compassion." I take a step forward, and all three of them lean toward me instinctively. The mate bonds pull tight. "You broke my bones because it made you feel powerful. You burned my skin because you enjoyed it. You destroyed me piece by piece because you could. The curse didn't make you monsters. You chose that."

"Wren, please," Kade's voice cracks. "We're sorry. We'll spend the rest of our lives making it up to you. Just come home."

"Northern Crescent is my home now."

"Pack law says you're ours!" Dax snarls, his eyes flashing amber. "You're our fated mate! They have to return you!"



Thorne shifts to human beside me. "She asked for sanctuary. I granted it. Your laws don't apply here."

Luna Saskia finally speaks, her voice cold and sharp: "That omega belongs to my sons. Return her or we declare war."

"Try it," Thorne says calmly. "I'd love an excuse to destroy your pack."

Saskia's smile is cruel. She unwraps the silver cloth, revealing a small black box covered in strange symbols. "I don't need war. I need this."

Piper gasps from behind me. "That's a death curse box. Thorne, don't let her—"

But Saskia is already opening it.

Black smoke pours out, racing across the border straight toward me. I try to run but the smoke is faster. It wraps around me like chains, burning through my skin, sinking into my chest where the mate bonds are.

I scream.

The bonds ignite with agony—not the gentle pull anymore, but fire and acid and poison all at once. Through the pain, I hear Nyx howling, hear Thorne shouting, hear the triplets roaring in fury.

Saskia's voice cuts through everything: "That



curse will kill her in three days unless she returns to Ravencrest territory and accepts the mate bonds fully. Her choice—come home and be bonded to my sons forever, or stay here and die."

The black smoke disappears but the pain remains, burning in my chest where my heart should be.

Thorne catches me as I collapse. "Wren! Stay with me!"

I look up at him through tears. "She cursed me again. I can feel it. It's killing me."

"We'll break it—"

"You can't!" Saskia calls across the border. "Only blood magic can break blood curses. And the only blood that works is mate blood. She needs the triplets to save her."

The triplets are losing their minds on the other side of the border. Dax is shifted halfway, fighting his wolf. Flynn's hands are literally on fire. Kade is screaming my name over and over.

"Three days," Saskia repeats. "Come home and live as their mate. Or die free. Choose wisely, little omega."

They disappear into the forest.

I'm dying. Again. And this time, the only ones



who can save me are the ones who destroyed me in the first place.

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