

10~ Dogs Love The Sound Of Their Own Voices

Zane's Point Of View

"Zane?"

Miles leaned forward sharply, concern flashing across his face. "What's wrong? Are you in pain again?"

I stared at him, eyes wide, chest rising and falling with sharp, panicked breaths. "No... I mean... yes... no... it's not that... I..."

I gripped the sheets, my fingers trembling violently, and forced the words out before I lost my nerve.

"I heard something," I gasped. "A voice."

Miles blinked. "A voice?"

"My wolf." The words spilled out, shaky but real. "I-I think... I actually summoned it."

For a moment, he just stared, processing.

And then without hesitation, he smiled. Not that usual sharp, knowing smirk he wore like armor, but something softer. Warmer. Real.

"That's..." His voice broke, and he shook his head slightly, like he couldn't believe it either. "That's incredible."

And before I could think, before I could stop him, he reached out and hugged me.

I froze, stunned, caught between the unfamiliar weight of his arms around me and the realization that no one... no one... had held me like



this in years. Maybe ever.

Warmth. Safety. Not hunger. Not lust. Not cruelty. Just... contact.

His chin rested lightly against my shoulder, and I felt him exhale softly, like maybe he needed this as much as I did.

"You did it," he murmured close to my ear. "You actually did it."

I swallowed hard, throat raw. The ache in my chest was different now, not pain, but something deeper. Something fragile I didn't want to name.

His arms loosened, but his hands rested gently on my upper arms, grounding me.

"You have one more chance," he said softly. "Today is the last day of awakening. One final round."

Panic clawed up my throat again. "What if this isn't enough? Summoning the wolf doesn't mean I'll pass. What if I fail again?"

Miles's thumbs rubbed small, calming circles against my skin. "Then we try again. And again. And again. I'll make them test you until they see it."

"I can't..." My voice cracked. "I can't go back out there just to be laughed at again."

His eyes met mine, sharp, intense, ferocious. "Zane. Look at me."

I did.

"You are not weak," Miles said, low but fierce. "And you don't belong to them. Not to that pack. Not to their hate. Not even to him."

Him. Ronan.



A bitter taste rose in my throat.

"I know what it's like," Miles added, quieter now. "To be the one everyone underestimates. To have everything taken, and still... survive."

His gaze softened, but his grip didn't.

"Today... you're going to win. And I'll be right there. Every step."

For the first time in too long, something sharp and dark inside me softened. Just a little.

I nodded.

"I'll do it," I said quietly. "I'll try."

The voice inside me purred again, faint but pleased.

Finally.

Miles smiled again, sharp this time. "Good."

His hand brushed lightly against mine before pulling away fully, professional again. But I could still feel the imprint of his touch like a secret burned into my skin.

The temple stood like a monolith before me... cold, ancient, uncaring.

The great marble pillars shimmered under the faint morning sun, like silent judges ready to watch me fail again. Already, students milled around in loose clusters, their voices low but their gazes sharp. The Academy staff stood farther ahead by the ceremonial dais, faces impassive.



But I barely saw any of that.

Because he was here.

Ronan.

I spotted him instantly, standing near the edge of the group. His posture stiff, arms crossed, jaw tense like he was holding himself together by sheer will alone. His golden eyes were locked on something ahead of him, pretending not to see me, but the sharp tick in his jaw told another story.

Right next to him was Mark.

Of course.

Mark's lips curled when he noticed me, like a wolf scenting fresh blood in the water.

"Well, well," he drawled loud enough for others nearby to hear. "Look what the stray dragged in."

Laughter. Soft at first, then louder as others followed his lead, their eyes lighting up with cruelty.

"I thought you were done embarrassing yourself," Mark sneered, stepping forward. "Didn't the early failure burn enough the first time?"

More laughter. More eyes turning on me. Hungry for humiliation. I felt every gaze like knives sliding beneath my skin.

My throat tightened, shame hot and choking.

"Enough!"



Miles's voice cut through the crowd like a blade unsheathing, soft yet sharp, and suddenly everything froze. Even the wind seemed to hold its breath.

He walked beside me now, posture elegant but dangerous, a smile ghosting his lips like he knew something they didn't.

Mark blinked, thrown off. "Who asked you?"

Miles tilted his head, the picture of polite malice. "No one. And yet here I am, talking anyway. Isn't that strange?"

A ripple of uncomfortable tension ran through the gathered students.

Miles didn't look at Mark again. His attention was on me, gaze steady, like the noise around us didn't matter. Like none of them mattered.

"Let them bark," Miles murmured, only for me. "Dogs love the sound of their own voices."

My lips twitched, half a laugh, half a snarl. Somehow, standing beside him, the shame tasted different now. It wasn't weakness. It was fuel.

Miles stepped ahead, addressing the instructors waiting at the ceremonial circle.

"Zane is here to take his final chance," he said clearly, loud enough for the whole courtyard to hear. "The awakening ceremony is not yet closed. Unless, of course, the prestigious Wolf Academy has decided to start breaking its own traditions?"

A murmur swept through the crowd. Even the staff exchanged glances.

One of the instructors, an older woman with silver-threaded braids and sharp eyes nodded once. "It is permitted."



"Good." Miles smiled, all teeth. "Then let's begin."

Mark scoffed. "It's pointless. He's nothing."

This time, I didn't flinch.

I looked straight at Mark, at the sneering students, at the silent, golden-eyed storm pretending not to know me.

And I inhaled deep, slow, steady, and stepped forward toward the heart of the awakening circle.

