

11- You Deserve Better, Zane

Zane's Point Of View

Silence.

The kind of silence that doesn't just sit in the air, it presses against your chest, makes your throat dry, makes every heartbeat feel like it's echoing too loud in the back of your ears.

I stood in the center of the ceremonial circle, alone, small, a speck of broken bones and old bruises against the towering marble of the academy's ancient halls.

Nothing.

Absolutely nothing.

The ceremonial stone beneath my boots pulsed faintly with magic, ancient, cold, impersonal, but nothing happened.

Nothing.

My breath stuttered, panic rising sharp and fast in my throat. My heart beat too loud, too quick, and for one sick moment, I thought I might collapse again.

Behind me, I heard the soft snickers starting. Low at first. Then louder. Cruel.

"Pathetic," someone muttered.

I could feel their eyes eating into my back.

"Guess second time's not the charm."



"Mixed-blood trash."

I swallowed hard, throat raw.

Of course. Of course this was happening. Why the hell did I think it would be different this time? What was I even doing here? I was a joke to them. I was always going to be a joke to them.

I could feel Miles watching me from the edge of the dais. I wanted to look at him. Wanted that grounding, that calm, sharp voice that always cut through the noise but I couldn't.

And then... Boom.

A pulse.

Low. Distant. Like the heartbeat of something ancient, deep beneath the surface of the world, finally waking up.

And then... Light.

Red and blue exploded around me in twin spirals, sharp and blinding, curling upward like twin dragons coiling around my arms, licking at my skin without burning. Heat surged through my veins, flooding me so fast I almost fell to my knees.

Gasps rippled through the crowd, cutting the laughter into stunned silence.

"What the..."

"The stones... look at the stones!"

The mocking voices turned into confusion, confusion into panic.



I couldn't breathe. I could barely see.

The world narrowed into spinning red and blue halos dancing across my vision, the heat pressing against my ribs like I might burst into flame at any second.

Then, a hand on my shoulder.

Firm. Grounding.

Miles.

"Breathe, Zane," he said softly beside me. "Just breathe."

I dragged in a ragged, burning inhale, and the panic broke enough for me to focus on the figures hurrying toward the ceremony platform.

Teachers. Instructors. Officials with sharp cloaks and sharper eyes.

One of them, a middle-aged woman with ink-dark braids wrapped in golden cuffs stepped forward, inspecting the glowing sigils circling around me with narrowed eyes. Her lips parted as if to speak but she hesitated.

Another teacher came running. Whispers spread like wildfire.

"This shouldn't be possible."

"Two elements?"

"No student's ever achieved that."

I stared at them, panic rising again for a new reason. What if this wasn't good? What if I'd broken the test? What if they were about to expel me on the spot?

My entire chest was a mess of fire, panic, and wild hope.

Finally, the teacher spoke, her voice slow, deliberate, like she couldn't quite believe the words she was about to say.

"This student..." Her sharp gaze scanned over me like I was some dangerous artifact. "Has successfully awakened both physical and mental magic. He..."

She paused again.

"He can choose any academy division he wants."

The silence that followed felt like thunder. I didn't even react at first. The words didn't make sense in my ears.

Both?

Both types of magic?

I glanced sideways, dazed, and caught the stunned fury flashing across Mark's face.

Perfect.

Right on cue, Mark stepped forward, jaw tight, eyes burning with embarrassment and venom.

"This is... this is rigged!" he barked, voice shrill, eyes darting wildly to the officials. "There's no way a mixed-blood like him! Someone tampered with the ceremony!"

The crowd, still too stunned to speak, hung on his words, uncertain. Then, another voice. Calm. Smooth. Dangerous.



Miles.

"Oh?" he drawled lazily, stepping forward with that signature smile. "Are you accusing the official ceremonial magic of this institution of being faulty?"

Mark flinched.

Miles's eyes glittered like polished blades.

"Or," Miles added, voice lower now, "are you accusing the elders of not knowing how their own magic works?"

Now that got the attention of the staff. Several instructors straightened sharply, offended murmurs rippling through them like a sudden storm on still water.

"I..." Mark tried. "I didn't mean...I just..."

Miles raised a brow. "Mm. Thought so."

Mark stumbled backward like Miles had physically struck him, his face pale and twisted with humiliation. He opened his mouth to fire back, but someone caught him by the shoulder before he could embarrass himself further.

Ronan.

Effortless. Controlled. That same unnerving calm that felt like standing next to a wolf pack leader who hadn't decided yet whether to let you live or not.

"Enough," Ronan said quietly to Mark, but there was venom beneath the calm. A command, not a suggestion.

Mark flinched like a scolded dog and lowered his eyes, burning with shame. But Ronan's eyes weren't on him.

They were on me.

And the moment our gazes collided, it was like a spark hitting dry leaves in summer.

Heat. Fury. Possession.

But what made my throat close wasn't the fury in his expression. It was that flash of something else beneath it.

Jealousy.

Ronan's gaze flicked to Miles's hand still lightly touching my sleeve in a deceptively casual gesture, and his jaw flexed with a tension that promised something violent was barely being held back.

Then, Ronan spoke, voice sharp, cutting through the tense air like a blade drawn across silk.

"Zane."

Just my name.

But it was different this time, not the cold dismissal he used before, not the disgust or mockery. It was... something else. Something raw.

"You should come to the Wolf Academy," he said flatly, ignoring Miles entirely. "Your magic might be unusual, but you're still one of us. Your blood is wolf blood. And our power..." His golden eyes locked with mine. "...is far stronger. The only power worth having."

His voice was sharp, but there was something underneath. Something

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that almost sounded like pleading, but twisted and ugly, like he didn't know how to ask properly without making it sound like a demand.

I opened my mouth, but then, "I don't know," Miles drawled, stepping closer, sliding himself between Ronan and me like silk over a blade. His smile wasn't sharp anymore, it was lazy, taunting.

"Maybe he'd prefer somewhere with better manners," he said smoothly. "Somewhere people don't treat those who trust them like trash."

That word... trust, cut sharper than any blade. No one moved. No one spoke. The air felt thick, charged.

Ronan's entire body tensed, his fists curling like claws, golden eyes darkening, not with embarrassment, but with something darker.

Possessiveness. Fury. Guilt, twisted into something violent.

Miles tilted his head slightly, eyes glinting with cool mockery. "Or does the Wolf Academy specialize in using people until they break?"

That one landed.

Hard.

Ronan's jaw flexed like he wanted to tear the world apart with his teeth. His breathing was sharp, uneven, but his voice came out like steel dragged across stone. "Careful."

Miles only smiled wider, like he'd won something.

"You deserve better, Zane," Miles murmured without looking away from Ronan. "Not someone who'll tear you down in front of a crowd just to keep his reputation intact."



Heat burned under my skin, shame and rage knotting in my chest like a storm twisting in on itself.

And everyone was staring. Two student council presidents. Both of them. Right here. In front of everyone. Both offering me a place in their academies.

I didn't know where to look. Didn't know what to say.

I stood there... frozen. Completely, utterly stunned.

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