

Broken by One, Desired by All -02~ Leaving The Pack

Zane's Point Of View

They didn't speak. They didn't need to. Two guards dragged me up by my arms, their claws barely sheathed. One of them kicked my knees out from under me, and I crumpled like cloth. Another punch landed on my ribs. I heard the crack.

"Confess," one of them snarled. "You'll save yourself a lot of pain."

"I didn't do anything wrong," I spat, blood painting my teeth.

They didn't like that. The next few minutes blurred into a haze of fists, boots, and pain so sharp I thought I might black out. My body shook violently as they dunked my head into a bucket of ice water and held me down until my lungs screamed.

When they pulled me up again, gasping and broken, another voice echoed through the cell.

"Still refusing?" Marius's voice was calm. Too calm. Ash's father stepped into view, his tall frame casting a shadow over me. His eyes, cold and empty, regarded me like I was something stuck to the bottom of his boot.

"You could make this easy. Just say what we all know you are. Say you seduced him. Say you're a filthy, disgusting Omega who preys on strong bloodlines."

"I won't lie," I whispered.

He smiled. That cruel, dead smile.

"Then you leave me no choice. We'll make an example of you. A public trial. So everyone will know the fate of an abomination."

The guards laughed as they dragged me back into the dark. My breath came in short, ragged gasps. Every inch of me hurt. But nothing compared to the ache in my heart.

That night, the cell door opened again.

At first, I thought it was just another guard shift. Maybe another round of beatings. But when I looked up with my one good eye, I froze.

Ash.

He stood there, robed in the fine silk of an heir, a faint scent of expensive cologne clinging to him. But his eyes... they darted around like he didn't want to be seen.

"You shouldn't be here," I rasped. My voice barely sounded human.

He stepped closer. I flinched.

"Zane," he whispered. "Listen to me. You have to confess."

I blinked. My face twitched from the pain.

"What?"

"Confess," he said again, more forcefully. "Say you seduced me. Say you lied. They might let you live. I might be able to convince my father to let you stay."

I let out a broken, humorless laugh.

"Stay? Stay where? In the pack that spit on me? In a cell? Is that what you call mercy?"

He clenched his fists. "Zane, don't be stupid. You think you can win against him? Against the entire pack? I'm trying to help you. Without me, you are NOTHING."

There it was.

The truth.

"So I was nothing to you? Just a secret? A dirty little sin you could toss away when it got too inconvenient?"

He looked away.

"Ash," I said quietly. "Did you ever feel anything for me? Even for a second? When you held me that night... when you said you loved me... was any of it real?"

He hesitated. Just a flicker. But then his jaw tightened.

"You're ungrateful. I should've let them kill you the night we were caught."

I stared at him. He was everything I had once prayed for. And now, I saw nothing but a coward wearing the skin of the boy I loved.

"Go to hell," I said.

His eyes darkened. "You'll regret this."

"I already do. I regret ever trusting you. I regret every kiss. Every moment. Every lie you whispered into my mouth."

He turned sharply, storming to the door.

"You're weak," I called after him. "You think you're powerful because you wear silk and your father's name. But you're still a scared little boy hiding behind his dad's fists."

He paused, his back to me.

"You're going to die, Zane," he said coldly. "And when you do, no one will remember your name."

The door slammed behind him.

And I was left alone. But I knew one thing. I would never confess. Let them bring the trial.

I didn't hear the door open. Not over the thunder in my chest. Not over the echoes of Ash's voice still haunting my mind like venom dripping slow and cruel.

Then I saw her... Granny Eartha, stooped with age, her spine bent like the weathered willow behind the healer's hut. Her wrinkled hands clutched a lantern. She looked at me like a mother should look at her child, not with pity, but with sadness... and fury at what had been done to him.

"Granny?" My voice was hoarse, my throat raw from the screams they'd tried to beat out of me.

She dropped to her knees beside me and cupped my cheek. Her fingers trembled. "Oh, my sweet boy... my poor, brave boy."

I flinched. I hadn't been touched kindly in so long, I'd forgotten what it felt like. "I can't stay long," she whispered. "They don't know I'm here."

"Why did you come?"

"To save you."

She pulled something from her robes... a heavy iron key, old and blackened with rust. The prison door creaked as she slid it into the lock and turned it with a strength I didn't think she had left in her.

The door clicked.

Freedom.

I stared at it like it was a mirage.

"But the trial," I stammered. "They said..."

"They'll kill you, Zane," she snapped, her voice cutting through the haze of pain and disbelief. "You know it. You think that man cares about truth? That pack? They'll parade you like a hunted animal and cheer when your blood stains the earth. Run. Before the guards come for you again."

Tears welled in my eyes, too hot, too fast.

"Why are you helping me?"

She didn't hesitate. "Because you're not disgusting. You're not shameful. You're you. That's all you ever had to be. And I won't stand by and watch them butcher the only child I've ever cared for in this cursed pack."

I swallowed the sobs clawing at my throat and nodded. "Thank you... I don't know how to repay..."

"By living," she said fiercely. "By surviving."

She gave me a bundle of food, a dagger wrapped in cloth, and a bottle of what she claimed was a strength potion. Then, with one last kiss to my temple, she whispered, "Go. Now. Through the servant's corridor, down the old river trail. Don't stop. Don't look back."

I ran.

Back Home

I didn't have much to pack.

A worn satchel. A second-hand coat that still smelled like the boy I used to be. A pouch of dried herbs Granny Eartha had once given me for pain, still tied tight with fraying thread. A faded photograph of me and my father when I was little, back before the world taught me that kindness could rot and the ones you love the most can twist the knife deepest.

And the pocket watch.

That damn old watch, still ticking after all these years. Smooth brass surface worn thin from time and fingers, and the faintest engraving on the back: "To My Brightest Star."

My father said it had belonged to my mother... the woman I never met, never knew. He told me once that she loved me fiercely. That she died protecting me.

It was the only lie I wanted to believe.

I stood in the silence of the house... the house that had never felt like home. Just four walls that knew too much pain.

The floor creaked beneath my feet. The fireplace was cold, ashes long dead. I stared at the photo again. My father's smile in it was so full, so real. I had forgotten what that looked like.

I shoved the photo deep into my satchel and pulled on the coat. The fabric clung to my skin like memory, itchy, faded, and heavy. Like the weight of who I used to be.

I moved fast, careful not to make noise, even though my hands shook and my chest felt too tight.

One last look around.

And then I stepped outside.

The night air hit me like a slap... sharp, cold, biting through the layers. The moon hung above like a hollow eye watching everything. The forest loomed ahead, gnarled and dark.

My boots sunk into the damp earth. I kept to the shadows, ducking between trees and cutting across the path Granny Eartha had whispered about, a hidden trail that wound around the north border. She said it was old. Forgotten. That no one patrolled it anymore.

At first, everything went smoothly.

No footsteps. No angry voices. No alarms. My breath came in sharp exhales, white puffs vanishing into the dark.

I dared to believe I was going to make it.

Until... Snap.

A stick behind me. Then another. Then, footsteps. Not just one. Many. My pulse stopped. My breath hitched. I froze behind a tree, listening.

Crunch.

Crunch.

Crunch.

Getting closer.

I pressed my hand against the rough bark, trying to steady myself. My body tensed, aching from days of beatings, but adrenaline had a way of silencing pain. My mind screamed at me to run, but my instincts warred with the urge to wait, to listen.

Another step.

Then... voices.

Low, urgent, too far to understand but close enough to know they were real. They were chasing me. No. Not now. Not after I made it this far.

I bolted.

