

Broken by One, Desired by All

C – 6

Ronan's Point Of View

"Ronan! Didn't think I'd see you here," Mark called out, striding toward me through the grand marble hall of the Arcanum Institute like he owned it. His white robes were spotless. Too spotless. The glint in his eye told me he'd come not to catch up... but to stir the pot.

I didn't move at first. My hands were clenched behind my back, fingers digging into the fabric of my sleeves. The hall was buzzing... students moving between classes, magical sigils dancing on the domed ceiling overhead, teachers whispering incantations as they walked. And yet, Mark's voice sliced through it all like a blade.

He stopped in front of me, eyes gleaming. "Did you hear?" he said with a smirk. "They were only supposed to take one from our region. But thanks to Zane, someone else didn't make it. Poor bastard blocked the slot."

I narrowed my eyes. "Is that so?"

"Oh, yeah," he chuckled. "Zane's a failed awakening. Mixed-blood. Probably shouldn't even be here." He leaned in conspiratorially. "But you know how these transfer sigils work. Sometimes trash slips through."

I had felt it the moment Zane arrived. The pull. The tether. Like fate had looped an invisible string around us both.

I glanced sideways, instinct pulling me to look, and there he was. Standing just a few feet away. Zane's eyes were locked on mine.

There was no hatred in them. Not anger. Just... raw, open confusion. Longing. Our eyes met for half a second too long. That's when I felt it, the spark trying to bridge between us.

He knew.

Shit.

I couldn't let that happen. Not here. Not now. Not with this many people watching.

I closed my eyes for the briefest second and forced the mental barrier down between us... a sharp, burning wall of will. I shoved it into place with every ounce of strength I had. Blocked him out. Locked him away.

But I didn't expect the scream that followed, not from his lips, but from his soul. Zane's eyes widened. Blood gushed from his mouth.

And then, he collapsed.

A thud echoed through the hall as he hit the ground, hard and fast, like a puppet whose strings had been severed.

For a second, the entire hall froze.

"What the hell?" someone gasped.

I turned and walked away almost immediately, I moved with purpose, each step echoing with the weight of urgency.

Behind me, my subordinates remained, their orders clear: observe the remaining awakenings. But my thoughts were elsewhere, consumed by the image of Zane collapsing, blood staining his lips, the bond between us reacting violently to my suppression.

As I turned a corner, a figure stepped into my path. Miles. His presence was unexpected, his expression unreadable.

"You're in my way," I said coldly, eyes narrowing at Miles as he planted himself like a damn tree in the middle of the corridor.

The torches on the wall behind him crackled as though they sensed the tension flaring between us. My wolf, already pacing in my chest since the moment Zane hit the floor, let out a low snarl, not liking this delay. Neither did I.

Miles held his ground, arms folded. His calm tone only grated me further. "Ronan... something isn't right. I felt it back there. Your aura... your control, it slipped."

I rolled my shoulders, suppressing the agitation building in my core. "Don't act like you care. Drop the nice-guy act and get out of my way."

He didn't flinch. Not even a blink. Instead, Miles tilted his head ever so slightly. "It's not about being nice. It's about the fact that your eyes changed the moment Zane collapsed"

My heart thudded. Hard. Once.

My face remained unreadable. "He's not my concern."

Miles watched me intensely still standing in my way. "I said," I growled, my voice dangerously low, "get out of my way."

Miles didn't argue. He did something worse.

He walked past me, toward Zane's limp body still lying crumpled near the Awakening Circle. I turned sharply, jaw clenched.

He knelt, his arms sliding beneath Zane's back and knees like it was second nature, and lifted him with effortless grace. The unconscious boy looked even paler in his arms, blood still crusted at the corner of his lips. That image struck me harder than I wanted to admit.

Miles turned to leave.

"Why are you doing that?" I asked, stepping forward instinctively. He didn't even glance at me as he said, "Since you said he's nothing to you, I'll take him to the infirmary."

My fists clenched at my sides as I watched Miles walk away, Zane's limp body hanging in his arms like something broken... discarded. My jaw tightened until I thought I'd crack a tooth.

And deep inside, my wolf stirred, snarling, clawing at my insides like a beast chained too long.

But I had already said it. Already drawn the line in front of everyone. Zane meant nothing to me. I'd made sure they all heard it.

Backtracking now? That would make me look weak. I don't show weakness. I never have.

Then Miles glanced over his shoulder, just once. Cool. Composed. Like he was already two steps ahead of me. "You sure you don't want to stop me?" he said, voice laced with that casual sharpness that always made me want to punch something. "This is your last chance."

I met his gaze with ice. "Why would I stop you?" I asked, my voice flat. Cold. "He means nothing to me."

He smiled... a tiny, smug little thing. Barely a twitch of his lips. "Right... nothing."

I didn't respond.

I couldn't.

The silence that followed was deafening. Not peaceful. Not still. Just... loud.

I turned sharply on my heel, my cloak whipping behind me like a storm. My wolf thrashed beneath my skin, restless, enraged, confused. Pacing. Growling. Howling.

Why him?

The further Miles carried Zane, the more my wolf howled like it was being ripped apart. I clenched my jaw harder. My hands shook. My blood felt like fire beneath my skin.

This wasn't supposed to happen.

He was a failed awakening. A mixed-blood. A disgrace to everything I'd worked to build. I was supposed to hate him.

I shouldn't care.

"I shouldn't."