

Broken by One, Desired by All

C – 7

Zane's Point Of View

The first thing I noticed was the quiet hum of magic in the walls. Then the dull ache in my ribs reminded me I was alive.

Barely.

“Miles?”

His face tilted toward me in that same unreadable way he always wore. “You’re awake,” he said softly.

“Why... why are you here?” My throat was raw, dry. It hurt to speak.

“I’m the one who brought you here,” he said and shrugged. “Couldn’t exactly leave you on the floor coughing up blood.”

I swallowed thickly. “You... helped me. Again.”

“It was nothing.”

“Nothing?” I rasped. “You could’ve gotten in trouble.” He shrugged. “Already in trouble. Might as well make it worth it.”

That got a weak laugh out of me. It hurt.

Miles leaned forward, his gaze sharper now, more serious. “I hope... I hope you won’t give up on the academy because of what happened earlier.”

I blinked at him. “You... hope I stay?”

His jaw tensed like he was trying not to say too much. “Yeah. I do.” No one had ever said that to me before. Not Ash. Not anyone.

And yet here he was, sitting by my bedside. For the first time since I got here, I felt something other than fear and anger.

Warmth.

"I won't leave," I said quietly. "I don't want to leave. I..." I swallowed the knot rising in my throat. "I want to be here."

Miles's eyes flickered, and for a second I thought maybe he was going to smile, but it never quite made it past his lips.

"Good," he said simply. "Good."

Then the reality of it all came crashing back down, sharp as shattered glass beneath bare feet.

"But... I failed the awakening," I muttered. "They all saw it."

"That test isn't everything," Miles said quickly, leaning forward. "Besides... you're a hybrid, aren't you?"

I froze. My heart kicked against my ribs.

"How do you..?"

"Doesn't matter how I know," he cut in. "What matters is this: most hybrids who couldn't summon their wolf at first... awakened something else later. Magic. It's happened before. Rare, yeah, but not impossible."

My breath caught. "I can't summon my wolf," I admitted softly. "Not ever. I've tried. For years."

My voice broke the silence like glass underfoot, sharp and fragile all at once. Miles didn't move, just kept watching me the way he always did, steady, unreadable, like he was trying to see all the parts of me I kept hidden.

"Not once," I continued, bitter laughter curling at the edges of my voice. "Not even as a kid. All the other pups, they could shift by the time they were eight or nine. Me? Nothing. Just the weak little hybrid everyone liked to remind wasn't good enough."

I swallowed the knot forming in my throat. "But lately..." My fingers curled around the blanket draped over my lap. "Recently... I felt it."

That got a reaction. Miles's eyes sharpened, focused entirely on me now. "You felt your wolf?"

I nodded, exhaling shakily. "Just for a moment. I don't know how to explain it. It was like... like something was moving under my skin. Like something old... wild... waking up."

Miles's gaze didn't waver. "When?" The question hit harder than I expected. I looked away. Shame burned hot under my skin. "When... when I was with him."

Miles tilted his head slightly. "Him?"

"Ronan."

There. I said it.

The word felt like a confession, like handing over a secret that should've stayed buried.

Miles raised a brow. "Ronan?"

Heat prickled at my cheeks, but I forced myself to meet his gaze. "He's my mate." The words sounded strange coming from my own mouth. Heavy. Terrifying. Real.

Miles leaned back just slightly, assessing, calculating. "That makes sense."

I blinked. "What?"

He nodded once, like a decision just clicked into place in his head. "Physical proximity to your mate triggers bond responses. Especially with hybrids, sometimes emotional or physical intimacy is the thing that wakes the wolf."

I swallowed hard. Physical intimacy. My heart hammered.

"You're saying..." I wet my lips, pulse thundering. "If I... if I got close to him..."

"It might work," Miles finished for me. "If you want to summon your wolf, it's worth trying. I could..." He hesitated, then continued, "I can arrange something. A way for you to be near him."

My stomach twisted itself into knots.

The idea of being close to Ronan again, after everything terrified me more than any awakening ceremony or alpha glare. Ronan wasn't just some stranger. He was... mine. And not mine. A bond cut raw before it ever had a chance to heal.

"You want to run? Fine. But if you stay, you don't know who you'll become yet. And honestly..." His gaze softened just slightly. "I'd like to see it."

The warmth spread in my chest again, uncomfortable and sharp at the same time.

"You're the first person here who's actually..." I exhaled shakily. "You're my first real friend here."

He didn't flinch. Didn't even blink.

"I know."

I couldn't turn back now. Not after coming this far. Not after surviving betrayal, torture, exile. I needed this. I needed power. And I needed to stay. Slowly, I nodded. "Do it."

"You're sure?"

I looked up at Miles, my hands trembling slightly but my voice firm. "I'm going to summon my wolf. I don't care how painful or humiliating it is, I need this."

A flicker of something crossed Miles's face. Not quite pity. Something else.

Respect.

He nodded once. "Alright. I'll do what I can."

The room suddenly felt too small, too heavy, like all the oxygen had been squeezed out of it by the weight of the decision I'd just made.

Close to Ronan. Close enough to feel what could've been mine, if only things were different. If only, no. I clenched my fists. This wasn't about romance or soft words or happy endings. This was about survival.

Miles stood, brushing imaginary dust off his trousers. "Rest for now. I'll handle the rest."

I let my head fall back against the pillow, my chest tight, my heart screaming.

Night had settled over the Academy like a blanket of velvet, thick and pressing, the stars sharp against the darkness like shards of glass.

I didn't know how long I sat in that room, heart twisting, mind running circles around itself. Around him.

When the door creaked softly, Miles slipped inside, moving like a shadow, silent and certain. In his hands was something dark, something soft, catching the faintest light like silk dipped in shadow.

The cloak.

"Invisibility enchantment," Miles murmured. "One of the better ones we keep for... special occasions."

I stared at it. Thin, elegant, flowing between his fingers like water made of midnight.

"With this," he continued, stepping closer, "no one will see you. No sound. No scent. No trace. You'll get to him without being noticed."

I reached out, fingers shaking slightly. The fabric brushed against my skin, cool, whisper-light. But then Miles stepped forward, closing the distance between us in one smooth, confident motion.

"Let me," he said quietly.

Before I could speak, his hands lifted the cloak higher, gently spreading it, guiding it over my shoulders like I was something fragile, something breakable. The weight of the fabric settled around me like a second skin, cool and unfamiliar.

His fingers brushed the sides of my neck, adjusting the clasp beneath my throat.

I didn't move.

I couldn't.

His closeness was suffocating, but not in a bad way. It was steady. Intentional. Careful. He wasn't just dressing me in some enchanted fabric. He was marking this moment.

I could feel the heat of his breath near my ear, the steady rise and fall of his chest close enough to graze mine when I breathed too deep.

I hated how much I noticed.

"Perfect fit," Miles murmured, voice lower now, almost secretive, like the walls themselves shouldn't hear. His fingers lingered for half a second longer than necessary before finally pulling away.

"You sure about this?"

That question hung heavier than the cloak itself. "I don't know," I whispered honestly. "But I don't have a choice."

His gaze flicked over my face, sharp, intelligent, something unreadable behind it. "There's always a choice, Zane. Especially with people like him."

The way he said him made something cold twist in my stomach.

"You don't trust him," I said softly.

Miles's lips curved into something that wasn't quite a smile, but wasn't far from a snarl either. "Trust him? No. Want to break his jaw? Maybe."

Despite myself, I almost laughed. Almost. But instead, I whispered, "Thank you... for this." He shook his head. "Don't thank me yet."

The room was too quiet. Too still. I could feel the gravity of what I was about to do pressing against my ribs, making it hard to breathe.

"You know where to find him," Miles said, taking a step back finally. His warmth left with him, and I hated how cold it felt by comparison. "Top floor. Eastern wing. Alone."

Alone.

I clenched my fists under the folds of enchanted silk.

Ronan.

The name burned behind my teeth like a wound I refused to stop pressing my tongue against.

“Zane...” Miles’s voice stopped me before I could take a step toward the door.

I turned my head slightly.

His gaze caught mine, steady and sharp. “Be careful. And don’t forget why you’re doing this.”

I won’t.

I nodded once, sharp, and then slipped out into the night, my heart pounding against invisible ribs, my thoughts torn between revenge... and something dangerously close to longing.