

My Mate, My Enemy

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14-18 minutes

Keegan Stone

We exited the tent and walked through the makeshift village in Idaho, about to head back to my home state of Oregon.

Ever since werewolves were driven out of human communities, we had been living in makeshift villages in the forests of North America. Only a few towns had been taken over entirely by wolves.

My uncle looked at me with a smile; he was always giddy after one of my speeches.

“That whole group of wolves looked ready to go sign on for the cause,” my uncle said.

Translation: I have successfully signed up fifty more wolves to their deaths.

I grimaced. “I’m glad to help.”

“King Sebastian is happy with your work, and you know that if your dad were still alive, he’d be proud too,” my uncle told me.

My stomach twisted painfully in my gut. My father had been killed in the first year of the Feral War. He hadn’t exactly been a peacekeeper.

“I’m glad the king is happy,” I replied. I always made sure my voice was cool and disconnected when I spoke with my uncle. If he knew how I truly felt, I’d be locked up for treason.

I was the most influential speaker in the werewolf community. I could make a group of wolves do anything I wanted, so my gift with words had made me important in the king’s eyes.

And because of this, I met with him every few months to adjust my speeches accordingly.

“Apparently, he’s waiting for us back in Oregon.”

I groaned internally. This meant some sort of advancement had been made in the war. Whether it was good was unknown.

"I'm looking forward to speaking with him once we get back home," I replied modestly.

My uncle smiled. "I have a present waiting for you there as well. I decided to go to one of those underground auctions and I bought something I'm sure you'll appreciate."

My smile tightened. "Can't wait."

We walked to the edge of the woods and into the darkness. The gas lamps strung along the trees ended just before the tree line. I blinked, waiting for my vision to adjust to the lack of light.

Quick as a flash, I stripped down and shifted. I grabbed my clothes in my teeth, then shook out my limbs. It had been a while since I had shifted.

My uncle shifted as well, and I took a moment to appreciate the raw strength that rippled through his leg muscles. He was a strong wolf; aggressive, like my father.

We both took off into the night, staying in the shadows as we darted across highways and through small stretches of trees. We moved efficiently, never stopping to catch our breath.

At the same time, we constantly looked around, making sure we were aware of our surroundings. You couldn't be too careful with humans.

After hours of running at full speed, my uncle and I made it onto home soil, and I was able to relax slightly as I spied landmarks I recognized. My uncle let out a large breath and slowed his pace.

Half an hour later, we were in the large forest that surrounded the city of Portland.

I shifted and changed into my clothes, cracking my knuckles and rotating my shoulders. My uncle clapped my back and said, "Good run."

We followed the gas lamps along the trail and were stopped by two enforcers. The werewolves patted us down to ensure we had no weapons and inhaled our scents to recognize us as one of them.

We were allowed into the village, where we were instantly met with wolves from the King's Guard. "King Sebastian is here to speak with you, Keegan Stone," the taller of the two said.

I offered a small smile. "Very well, take me to him."

I was brought to the main tent, where my alpha, Cole Emerson, the luna, Livy Emerson, and their two children, Deelia and Colton, sat on the corner couch.

I nodded my head to Cole and then turned my attention to the man sitting behind the long table.

He had dark brown hair that was tousled slightly, as if he had been running, and green eyes that were precise and clear. He stood and shook my hand, offering me a seat.

I turned and looked at Deelia, who dropped one eyelid in a wink. Her hazel eyes were mischievous.

Deelia and I had a weird sort of fling that we worked hard to conceal from her father. We weren't mates but we enjoyed passing our time together.

"It's been a while, my king," I said, my voice steely. I was all business.

King Sebastian nodded. "Yes, it has. I'm here because we lost a good portion of our land in New Jersey, which means that we are going to need somewhere for the packs affected to live.

"I need you to convince some of the neighboring states to bring in some new wolves. I know this is hard as not many alphas want more wolves to feed, but we have to look out for each other."

Behind the king, a little boy had his nose stuck in a book. The cover was faded, so I couldn't make out the title, but whatever it was, he was totally engrossed in it.

A moment later, a woman walked into the tent, gaining everyone's attention.

She was tall and slender, with dainty and fragile-looking wrists. She was dressed in a blue sweater, jeans, and tall brown boots. Her golden hair complemented the diadem nestled on top of her head.

Queen Serena walked over to her son and placed him in her lap. He continued to read, not bothered at all.

Prince Harrison wasn't the social type. I had heard gossip about how King Sebastian was worried his son wouldn't be able to lead one day.

I cleared my throat and refocused my mind. "Of course, I'll leave later this week."

The king smiled. "Great. I just wanted to let you know how happy I am with your work for our cause."

"Well, I'm happy to help."

Behind the king, the queen snorted and rolled her eyes. I felt my cheeks flame and watched as the king's eyes narrowed.

Along with the gossip about Prince Harrison, I had heard that the king and queen were having trouble. Apparently, she was unhappy with the war and was upset her mate had no intention of suing for peace.

"Well, you're dismissed then, Keegan," the king said tightly. I bowed my head and got up before giving my alpha a stiff nod.

I left the tent and blew out a long breath, closing my eyes. I heard footsteps and watched as Deelia brushed past me, heading toward my tent.

I followed eagerly, keeping my distance in case anyone was watching. I entered the tent a few moments after Deelia and nearly jumped out of my skin when she was suddenly all over me.

I pushed her back slightly, taking her lips off mine as someone in the room cleared their throat.

I looked to the back corner to see my uncle wearing a look of superiority on his face. I cursed myself internally, knowing he could hold this over me now.

Deelia looked just as shocked as I was; her hazel eyes were wide and fearful. My uncle was not the nicest man on the planet.

"Did you forget that I got you a gift, Keegan?"

I shook my head, pushing Deelia behind me slightly. “No, sorry, I was just—”

When I couldn’t finish my sentence, my uncle stepped forward. “Ah, well, I guess I’ll reveal it now then.

“Miss Deelia, you should head back to your father’s tent. The royals will be leaving soon and your dad will want you to say goodbye to them.”

Deelia bowed her head slightly and ran from the tent with dark red cheeks.

I turned back to my uncle and balled my hands into fists. “It’s not what it seems,” I said coolly.

My uncle raised his hands. “I know, you know what you’re doing. I’ll leave you to it.”

I nodded. “So, this gift?”

“Yes,” my uncle clapped his hands together. “Right this way.”

I followed my uncle to the other portion of the tent and stopped dead in my tracks when we rounded the corner. Sitting on the floor in the corner was a young girl.

“What the hell is this?” I growled.

The girl’s head hung downward, so her white-blond hair masked her face. She was covered in blood; I wasn’t sure who the blood belonged to, but I guessed it was hers.

Her matching skirt suit was in tatters and hung off her. She was missing a shoe and was bound at the wrists.

“It’s your gift,” my uncle told me. “She’s a human, a very special one. I bought her at an auction.”

I had to resist the urge to throw up. “What—?”

“Human servants are all the rage, haven’t you heard? Doug Lott has two working for him.”

I had seen the pack enforcer walking high and mighty with two women trailing behind him, never lifting their eyes or saying a word. But I was never here long enough to investigate.

“Are you kidding me, Eric,” I growled, using his first name. “I don’t want her.”

My uncle's eyes hardened. "People have begun to question you, Keegan. You're not as lively at your speeches, not as dedicated. Your eyes are dead whenever you get up to speak.

"Quite frankly, they're dead all the time. Wolves are talking, and they're saying that you don't believe what you preach. This is how we're going to show them you stand with us."

I felt my stomach drop; I thought the act I had been performing for months was foolproof. "I won't."

Quick as a flash, his hand was around my throat. "If it weren't for you being a good speaker and of such value to the king, I would beat you bloody.

"I know you're a sympathizer, and if you weren't doing amazing things for the cause, I'd throw you to the humans.

"You need to get your act together. Your father was killed by a human, and you stand with them?"

"I don't..." I managed to get out. "I don't."

"Then what is it?" my uncle growled.

I gasped as his hold tightened. "I know they're going out there to die. And I'm sending them to their deaths. It's h-hard."

My uncle dropped his hold altogether, and I knelt over, trying to catch my breath.

"Well, in any case, you're going to show off your new servant, and you're going to make it damn clear which side you're on. Do you understand me?"

I nodded. "Yes."

My uncle's lip curled and his eyes looked cruel. He turned and stalked out of my tent rather abruptly, and I watched, slightly stunned, as his salt-and-pepper-colored head bobbed away.

I collapsed into the nearest chair, running my hands through my hair, pulling at the strands. I slammed my fist down on the table and gritted my teeth as a cup rolled off, spilling onto the ground.

I looked up at the girl and set my jaw. "Look up," I demanded. She quivered slightly, and I had to fight against the wave of sympathy that arose in me.

I had to be callous, I had to be detached. I had to be the person I had been pretending to be for months.

"Up," I growled.

She yelped and scrambled to her feet unsteadily. She toppled slightly and had trouble righting herself.

She was short and compact. Her hips were wide, her waist was small, and I could see she had powerful legs from the split up the side of her dress.

But it wasn't her figure that caught my attention but the sheer number of bruises and scrapes that covered her pale skin.

Her

A sudden jolt of protectiveness surged from my wolf, and I was taken aback. I was suddenly worried about her future.

I became anxious to see her face, which was still covered by her white-blond hair as she kept her eyes to the ground.

Perhaps sensing my stare, or perhaps by destiny, she looked up just as these feelings arose.

I was caught by surprise as her light gray eyes completely drew me in. She was as fair as winter snow; everything about her was pale, from her skin to her hair and eyes.

Her face was heart-shaped and lovely, and her lips were plump with a deep Cupid's bow.

An image filled my mind of her and me, years in the future, together and happy. I could see nothing but our life together; nothing but happiness and love.

My head was spinning, and my heart was pounding in my ears. I had this odd feeling that radiated throughout my arms and legs, as if every cell in my body had been lit on fire.

The thing I found the most astonishing was that she looked just as entranced as I was.

“Mate.” The word slipped out of my lips like a familiar melody, and I went rigid all over as everything I had built up in my head shattered into a million pieces.

She couldn’t be my mate. She wasn’t my mate. She was a human, and I was a werewolf. It was impossible. It was improbable. And it was terrible timing, above all else.

I felt a surge of panic as I looked at her, realizing what I’d have to do to keep us safe. I’d have to hate her.

“What?” she quirked her head to the side, drawing her pale eyebrows together, causing a small line to form between them.

She looked so breathtakingly beautiful that I felt a physical ache knowing what was to come.

“Nothing,” I snapped. “Why do you look like that?”

She instantly drew away, guarding her face again. It was an expression I recognized; it was the one I wore all the time. “I was in an accident.”

“What kind of accident?” I froze as a thought struck me. “It wasn’t my uncle, was it?” My wolf growled in my head, taking a fighting stance. This wasn’t something he did often.

She shook her head. “No,” she said. “It was other savages.” I flinched, knowing she was talking about my kind. Could she not feel the bond that connected us?

I narrowed my eyes. The more I looked at her, the more I thought I had seen her before. “Are you famous or something?” I asked, feeling dumb for doing so. “I feel like I’ve seen you before.”

Her eyes grew twice the size, as if she were scared. It was only then that I realized who she was. Lux Freeman.

“Oh,” I said, “it makes sense now. You’re perfect for his goals.” If people saw me and Lux together, her as my servant, there would be no doubt which side I stood on.

My uncle was cruel, but he was also smart.

She shrunk in on herself. “I-I’m not like my dad... I—”

“I finally got away.”

I turned to see Deelia enter the tent, her hazel eyes alight with mischief. Her dark hair had been pulled into a ponytail and she had switched out her tight tank top for a sweater.

Her tall frame came to a halt as she noticed Lux standing in front of me. "Who is this?" Her tone had hardened to ice as she glared at Lux.

"My new servant," I said shakily. Part of me wanted to shield Lux from Deelia's hard glare, while my other side wanted to tear into her for all the horrible things her father preached.

Deelia's eyebrows shot up. "Servant?"

"A gift," I said gruffly. "From Uncle Eric."

Deelia nodded and pursed her lips, folding her arms across her chest. "Why is she staring at you?"

I turned to see that Lux's bright eyes were fixated on my face and felt my cheeks heat up. "Go somewhere," I ordered, trying to sound edgy.

She looked around, her mouth falling open. She didn't know where to go.

"Go sit in the corner or something, *human*," Deelia spat, sounding meaner than I had ever heard her. She glared at Lux and watched as she limped to the corner she had been in previously.

My heart went out to her. She was obviously in pain and needed her wounds to be tended to, but I couldn't do so in front of Deelia.

"Maybe I should untie her hands," I mumbled my thoughts aloud.

Deelia shrugged. "Who cares? She's fine. Wanna go run?"

I shook my head. "I'm exhausted, I'm just going to crash." I gave her a stern look, letting her know that I intended to sleep alone.

Deelia's hazel eyes flickered over to Lux. "All right, I'm leaving then. I can see you're busy." She turned on her heel and stalked out of my tent, leaving me with mixed feelings.

I turned to Lux to find her staring at me again, almost in wonder. I felt my heart contract and swore at myself, knowing I was being illogical.

I had to keep myself under control. No matter how hard that was going to be.