

Lucy and Doug

My cheeks burned as I stared at the door.

Stupid. Stupid.

My heart throbbed painfully in my chest as realization sunk in: I had been rejected.

I pulled at my clothes and adjusted my shirt before moving around the tent, straightening things that were already in place.

Master Lott's servants had warned me to avoid stagnation. They said to keep moving, to keep busy, to keep serving. If not, I would crumble, break apart, cry until I couldn't breathe.

The two women had been nice enough, but they were detached in a way that could never be fixed.

I winced as I heard a far-off howl. I wasn't yet used to the sounds of the camp. It was still strange to hear the sound of wolves and not have to worry about being killed by one.

Lott's servants had told me that as a serving human, I was untouchable. At least, I couldn't be fatally injured.

I moved a pile of clothes off the dresser and was about to dust when I heard a soft thump. I looked to the ground to see a tiny leather-bound book had fallen out of a pair of jeans.

I picked it up, my skin prickling all over, and unwound the length of string that held it together.

Clearly, the book hadn't been opened in a long, long time. My fingers shook as I flipped to the first page and squinted at the name scrawled there: *P. Stone*.

I lowered the book and re-wrapped it, refusing to invade Keegan's privacy.

I tucked it into his top drawer and continued to clean when I heard the fabric of the tent's entrance shift.

I moved into the living space and couldn't help calling out to Keegan. However, it was not Keegan who watched me from the door.

The man raised his eyebrows. "Keegan? No sir, no master?"

I tucked my hands behind my back and lowered my gaze. "Can I help you, sir?"

The man walked into the tent with his two servants in tow. The man must have been Doug Lott. Louisa and Erin met my gaze before quickly dropping their heads.

"I'm looking for your master," Doug said, his nose turned up in a ridiculous fashion. He walked around Keegan's tent, picking up random things before placing them back down.

He stopped near the couch and nodded at Louisa who hurried to light a cigarette for him.

"I don't know where he went," I told him stiffly. "He left over an hour ago."

Doug squinted and moved toward me slowly. "Do I know you? That face looks familiar."

I immediately dropped my gaze, then turned my head to the side as my breathing quickened. I felt calloused fingers dig into my skin and yelped as he twisted my face toward him.

He stuck his features close to mine; the smell of tobacco was repellent. He sniffed the air, his lips pulling back to reveal yellow teeth. Bleary eyes stared into mine. "How'd you get so roughed up?"

I looked over his shoulder to Louisa, who was warning me with her eyes to tread carefully. "I was in an accident."

Doug sniffed the air again. "Something doesn't smell right about you. What did you say your name was?"

"You never asked, sir."

He laughed roughly. "I'm asking now."

"Lu-Lucy?"

Erin winced behind him.

My heart spiked and my hands became clammy. I tried to calm myself but Doug was staring and I could tell he knew I had lied to him.

"Lucy?" he nodded slowly. "It's an awful shame when we get servants who aren't properly trained." He eyed me up and down, his smile morphing into a sick grin. "But I do love breaking them in."

I hissed as I was thrown to the ground and rolled quickly before he had the chance to kick me. Doug laughed and reached for me, grabbing the back of my neck before I had the chance to get away.

"You have the most peculiar coloring, all silver." He reached with his free hand and ran his fingers through my hair, bringing strands to his nose and inhaling.

He dragged his nails down the side of my cheek and smirked. Then, he moved to bring his lips to mine, but before he could, I slapped him across the face.

"When I'm dead, *dog*."

Out of surprise, I was dropped to the ground. I got up and bolted, heading for the back of the tent and praying I was faster than Doug was.

Of course, I wasn't, and within seconds, I was lying on the ground with Doug pinning me there.

I struggled and yelled out, hoping Keegan would hear me, praying he could help but wishing I could save myself. Doug held my hands as he flipped me over so my back was against the ground.

"You'd better be careful, girlie. Little things like you shouldn't wish to be dead because it's oh so easy to make you that way, understand? I could crush your windpipe with two fingers.

"Let that knowledge teach you to treat me with some respect."

His cheek brushed against mine roughly. I tried to pull back but couldn't move.

In the distance, I heard the front of the tent rustle and then footsteps. Doug laughed and held me tighter, his repulsive breath fanning over my face.

"What's going on here?"

My whole body shook at the sound of Keegan's voice as relief washed right over me. I knew that if I had been standing, I would have fallen to my knees.

"What are you doing, Lott?" There was an edge of panic in Keegan's voice that turned my nerves to ice.

"Teaching your bitch a lesson, Stone."

"Lott, get off Keegan's, uh, property," an unfamiliar voice said.

"Lockheart, you're here too? Welcome to the party."

I squirmed under Doug's immense weight, but his fingers only dug deeper into my wrists.

I shifted my head so I could see Keegan's right hand and the side of his face. He was staring at Lott with a cold expression. "Get off her," he demanded. "She's mine."

"Yeah, well, she slapped me," Lott spat, his eyes glaring into mine. I held my gaze, staring back just as coldly. "And she's not sorry."

"Your servants are waiting for you, Lott," the guy called Lockheart said.

"Let them wait until they rot, I'll get more."

I watched Keegan's right hand ball into a fist, and then the weight was off me, and Doug Lott was on the ground, holding a bloody nose and cursing profusely.

The foreign boy with blond hair and kind eyes reached for me immediately, picking me up off the ground and tucking me behind his shoulder.

I watched as Lott staggered to his feet and growled at Keegan loudly.

Keegan swiveled his glance to mine for a brief moment before going back to Doug.

Louisa and Erin rushed to their master's side as they tried to tend to his broken nose. Each was pushed away by Doug.

"I should kill you," Doug snarled, his teeth bared and his eyes dark. "I should kill you, you spineless sorry excuse for a wolf."

Just then, Deelia entered, her hazel eyes flickering between everyone in the room. "What's going on here? What happened to Lott?"

Her eyes met mine and narrowed, her beautiful features becoming cold. She looked at Keegan, at his bruised knuckles, and quickly deduced what had happened. "You hit him?"

Lott growled. "One day, when you don't have the peacemaker, your girlfriend, or your bitch to hide behind, I'll get you, Stone. I'll kill you for this."

My heart fluttered as I perceived the gravity of such a threat.

Keegan stepped forward, ignoring Deelia's warning. He came face to face with Lott and smiled. "When the moment occurs, I won't hesitate to reach into your chest and rip out your heart.

"You like war, Lott? You enjoy it? Then I'll make sure war is the last thing you ever see. Now get out."

Lott growled and then turned on his heel and left, leaving Louisa and Erin to scramble after him.

Keegan's eyes found mine and he began assessing my injuries.

"She's fine, Keegan," the boy in front of me said. "Perfectly fine." The tone in his voice made me look up at the blond boy in confusion. He sounded older than he looked.

"Thank you, Jude," Keegan said. "And to you, Deelia."

Jude inclined his head but Deelia shook hers, eyes growing wide. "No way," she hissed. "No freaking way."

Keegan's brows drew together. "What is it?"

"Her?" she screeched. "Really?"

Keegan stilled. "Deelia—"

"She's your mate? The human? The servant? Is this a joke?" Deelia staggered backward, the hurt blatant on her face. It was obvious they had been more involved than I had previously thought.

Keegan shook his head. "No."

"Why else would you punch our pack enforcer? Threaten to kill him? Why would she be hiding behind Jude if she wasn't being protected? Why—Why stare at her that way if she isn't your mate?"

"No," Keegan pleaded, "she's not... She's just—"

"You've never looked at me like that," she mumbled. "I-I can't believe."

"You can't say anything," Keegan blurted. "No one can know."

Both Deelia and I recoiled. I empathized with the girl, knowing how it felt to be verbally slapped.

Deelia shook her head, her eyes watering. Slowly, she backed up before she turned fully and fled. Keegan's hands balled into fists as he swore as loudly as Doug had.

"Keegan," Jude began. "It's all right, we can—"

"Nothing will be all right if she blurts anything to her father, Jude. You and I both know she'll be..." Keegan looked at me and trailed off, features softening.

Jude moved forward and placed a hand on Keegan's shoulder. "Mates come into our lives for a reason," he said softly. "It will be okay."

Jude then tipped his head toward me and left. The silence was heavy as Keegan stood still with his face in his hands.

"Are you hungry?" I asked, hoping to break the silence.

Quick as lightning, Keegan was in front of me. He placed his hands on my face gingerly, his eyes traveling the path of my skin, looking for abrasions.

"Are you all right?" His hands traveled to my neck, pushed back my hair, skimmed the marks Doug had left.

I nodded slowly, unable to swallow the lump in my throat.

His fingers glided down my arm, leaving goosebumps in their wake. Finally, he grabbed my wrists and kissed where Doug had harmed me.

I jerked away and the dazed expression left Keegan's face. "Are you hungry?" I repeated, my voice firm.

I had offered him an out, an opportunity to make it work, but he had rejected me. I refused to be desperate, to be the kind of girl who waited and yearned for another moment to try again.

I had to clear these desires from my mind and focus on returning to my father, to my life before the abduction. Keegan had made it painfully clear that his future did not involve me.

All I had to do now was convince myself that he couldn't be in mine.

In my dreams, it snowed. The ground was covered in white, the air was pale, the sky was gray, and the trees sparkled with ice.

I walked through a field, barely feeling the chill of the winter air, ignoring the nip of the wind against my face.

I was heading toward the forest, but every time I reached it, the trees would push back another hundred yards and I would have to continue walking.

Up ahead, there was a break in the snow; a dark splotch that chilled my bones.

I hurried toward it, stumbling into a half run. I reached the spot and stilled. This was the part of the dream when the snow seeped into my pores, turning my blood to ice and rooting me to the ground.

Lux was lying in the snow, her hair and skin so pale that they were barely distinguishable. The snow around her was stained a deep red as blood from her midriff soaked into the snow around her.

I dropped to my knees. Feelings of regret filled me up and hollowed me out. I reached for her, but as I did, her back arched and she let out a scream that cracked the ice around us.

Her eyes opened, flashing silver, before her entire body began to morph.

Within minutes, she was a wolf, tiny and gray, her fur damp with blood. She stood on shaky legs and stared at me, her eyes full of blame.

Her head tipped back as she let out a long, piercing howl that knocked the breath from my lungs.

She collapsed then, falling to the ground as her legs twisted at odd angles.

The snow piled on top of her until she disappeared, and then I woke up.

I gasped for air, my chest heaving and body aching. I stumbled out of bed and stared at myself in the mirror, not recognizing myself at first.

I swore under my breath and then walked into the living space, spotting Lux curled up in the corner I'd first seen her in.

I slipped my arms underneath her and lay her on the couch before rocking back on my heels and running my hands through my hair.

Then I turned and walked over to the recliner and sat down on the edge of it, watching as Lux sighed and readjusted herself on the couch.

I knew that if I continued to ignore the way I felt about her, I would die.

But if I didn't ignore her, then she would.