Family Reunion

Heavy breathing.

Pounding footsteps.

Blurred vision.

I felt like I had run a marathon. The mansion was huge, but my feet pushed me forward.

The Demon Lord mentioned my family and had begun walking me toward a large room near the back of the mansion.

He had promised me a dream, and I held on to hope that he would not lie. Yes, he was a demon, but everything I had heard and everything I saw with my eyes were opposite sides of the same coin.

In his presence, I only felt adored, not disturbed.

Once we had left the carriage and entered the complex, I had not been chained. Instead, they let me run free, even with the threat of my owing washing at the back of their minds.

Now, I was going to see my family. After so long, we would be reunited!

When he pointed to the large double doors and smiled, I could not contain my excitement any longer. I rushed forward like a sprinter out of my blocks.

The servants had gasped at my forwardness, but I could hear Lasarus laughing with glee. He enjoyed seeing his new possession spirit throughout his mansion, like an adopted puppy discovering its new home.

"Look at that energy. I can only hope she'll have as much tonight," he said, to the laughter of others.

A chill pricked up the hairs on my arms, but I had no time to think about his immodest remarks. Nothing mattered now that I knew my family was here…

I burst through the doors.

The smile on my face began to fade. My family was nowhere to be seen. The room looked empty.

A movement from the corner caught my attention and I turned to see…

Gregory!

The boy from my pack. Sean's best friend, stood without looking at me. He was just like he had been back home, shy and unsuspecting.

I looked at him even though his eyes were wary to meet mine.

"Gregory. I can't believe you're here!" I screamed with glee.

I ran to him and threw my arms around his shoulders.

His body tensed upon feeling my touch. I didn't care! It was so nice to rally see someone with a familiar face.

Especially someone I had such a crush on for so many years.

"Where is my family?" I asked again.

I looked at him once more, and this time, his eyes met mine.

"I'm sorry, Belle," Gregory said, his voice lled with sadness.

What did he have to be sorry for?

I looked him up and down.

It was most de nitely Gregory. His long brown hair hung like a crown of curls around his head. With each movement of his body, they swayed back and forth.

I had once been mesmerized by this young man standing before me. Now, I was just happy to know he was safe.

But what about my family? Why was he sorry?

"It's good to see you." Gregory's voice was quiet, uncertain.

"What a perfect little reunion," I heard Lasarus say from the doorway.

He had been there the entire time, watching.

I turned away from Gregory and looked at the Demon Lord.

"You told me my family was here!" I shouted.

"And I always keep my promises," Lasarus assured me.

I looked once more at Gregory.

He was chewing the inside of his mouth, as was his habit when nervous.

Of course, I could understand. It was stressful, being taken from the only home you knew, standing in the presence of Lasarus.

But his nervous tick made me think something else was at play.

"Gregory is a part of my pack, but he is not my family," I said.

Lasarus moved farther into the room. He seemed to enjoy my confusion and the little game at hand.

"You were left at the border as a child, were you not? And your family adopted you as one of their own," he said, with utter joy in his voice.

This guessing game might be fun for him, but I wasn't having any of it.

I nodded in agreement.

"You were not alone. There was another that was left behind at the border," Lasarus hissed gleefully.

Gregory's eyes met mine. His teeth clenched tight and his shoulders dropped. I couldn't believe my eyes, much less my ears.

"This can't be…"

The same boy I had so naively believed was to be my mate was now standing before me, as my family?

"Gregory is your half-brother," Lasarus said.

I felt my legs turn to jelly and give way. Gregory tried to catch me, but my dead weight brought him to the ground.

He landed on top of me. and for a moment we lay there, looking at one another in disbelief.

Gregory held me the way I had always imagined. There was a kindness to his touch, almost as if he had known me forever, was somehow a part of me.

I remembered the nd time he was included in my family's group chat. My parents suggested a movie night and told us to invite our friends.

Mine always seemed to not a way to skip social events, but Gregory had accepted the invitation eagerly.

SEAN
Getting some snacks for movie night. Any suggestions?

MOM
Popcorn!

SEAN
Well, of course.

DAD
Anyone else feeling tacos tonight?

BELLE
We had tacos last night

DAD
Aruh!

MOM
Your stomach will mutiny…

BELLE
Great guys… What do you think Gregory?

GREGORY
Something chocolate would be awesome!

BELLE
Sean, grab a bar for us to share!

DAD
Chocolate and sweets!

SEAN
People are forgetting Gregory is my friend. NOT a potential mate.

DAD
Gregory's a part of our family. Don't forget the chocolate!

MOM
Or the sweets!

SEAN
>_<

"I didn't know, Belle, I swear," Gregory pleaded. "Not long after you left, I was taken while alone. They brought me here and told me everything. At nd, I didn't believe it, but…" His voice trailed o .

That sweet, innocent boy I had crushed on for so long was right in front of me. And he was just as confused…

Gregory shook his head and searched for some semblance of understanding. "He knows things about me even I didn't know," he said, before falling down at my side.

I had never felt his body so close to mine unless we were sitting on the couch. And even then, Sean would make sure to jump in between us.

To feel his touch was all I had wanted…

But this was no innocent movie night at my house. It was the lair of the Demon Lord.

Gregory pulled away and stood up. He o ered me a hand, but Lasarus was there nst, grabbing my wrists and gently lifting me to my feet.

"This is impossible," I said with uncertainty.

"With all that you have learned these past few days, it would expect you to understand, nothing is impossible. Especially not with me," Lasarus said.

Lasarus held my hand and gave me kisses, slowly moving up my arm. I jerked my arm away from his cold lips.

"Give me space!" I yelled at Lasarus. "If you want me to even begin accepting all of these sudden changes, you have to give me some time. Or else you can screw o ," I said with growing con dence.

I felt emboldened, especially with Gregory at my side. But I was still wary of Lasarus' response.

His eyes ashed red, but his mouth showed only a smile. "Of course, my love, how silly of me," Lasarus replied.

"Explain this to me. Or do you like keeping your mate in the dark?" I said.

"Only if I'm there beside you, my love," Lasarus said seductively.

He tried to move toward me again, licking his lips.

I wanted to punch him in his smug face. From my experience with Keith, I knew that a show of strength at this moment would only make things worse.

"Who am I? Tell us, Lasarus, what do you know about our parents?" I demanded.

"You are the children of Balal, the great Demon commander," he said.

I looked to Gregory. His face showed more understanding than my own, but I could still sense a profound confusion.

"We had di erent mothers?" I found myself asking.

Lasarus licked his lips once more. "Yours, my love, was a powerful witch."

A witch?! I felt lightheaded and unsure of my own ability to stand.

Gregory wrapped an arm around me, holding me tight.

Lasarus watched us with envy.

"Who was she? What was her name?" I heard myself ask.

Lasarus smiled again. "I don't know that information. Balal had many lovers, but judging by your own hidden strength, I would assume her abilities surpassed many of her peers. After all, he only had eyes for the best… That would make you a hybrid, my love. The rst of your kind."

I was trying to wrap my head around such unexpected revelations.

I only wanted to see my mother, father, and Sean.

I wanted to embrace them and let them know that I was okay, that I had learned so much since we last met.

But now, I truly understood that would not happen.

Not any time soon.

I felt a fragile hand touch my shoulder.

"I'm so sorry. I don't know where they are. But they have to be safe. They must be." Gregory tried to calm my nerves, but it only made me angry.

I pulled away from his hand and was scooped up by Lasarus, who was waiting behind, ready to intercept.

"You've learned a lot this evening, my love. I think it's best if we get you some rest."

The look on Lasarus' face as he said this let me know there would be no rest this evening.

Flickering candlelight.

Seductive whispers.

Warm kisses.

My head continued to spin as I lay on the bed in Lasarus' master suite. He had feigned comfort, assuring me a good night's rest was all I needed.

I thought of Gregory, and my confusion only grew. Had he known about this, or was this sudden reveal just as surprising?

His body language spoke of uncertainty. He had always been shy and unsure. But his lack of shock upon hearing about our father told me information was still being withheld.

SMACK.

Lasarus worked his lips up my arm, across my collarbone, and to my neck. I could feel the residue left behind by his wet kisses.

SMACK.

The sound echoed o the walls, surrounding us as we lay in the gentle candlelight.

I turned over, showing him my back.

His ngers touched my spine, moving down, sending chills throughout my body.

Maybe turning a blind eye to him was a bad idea. I pulled myself to the edge but could feel him follow.

"I know this is a great revelation for you. I would feel the same shock," Lasarus tried to relate with me, but somehow, I couldn't imagine a Demon Lord feeling half the emotions I had pulsing through my veins.

He continued on. "But if anything, this proves our destiny. You are a being unlike any other. I know how to appease your deepest, darkest desires. You belong here with me."

I turned to face him, allowing him the chance to hover over me.

Bad idea.

Lasarus' eyes burned a deep crimson that I had yet to see. His hair stood on end as usual, but the spikes looked sharper, ready to cut anything that dared to touch them.

"Please, I'm so tired…" I said, with a hint of sleep in my voice.

"Let me. If you with energy, my love. It is all I have ever wanted," he said, as he licked his lips once more.

I felt my blood run cold.