Guarding The Barrier

Not two minutes had passed since Keith vanished behind the gate doors when doubt and anxiety overcame me.

Why had I opened the door to the underworld knowing very well the consequences it came with?

I stood there with my staff in hand, knees bent and shoulder-width apart, ready to use my magic to make any demon meet its demise.

Should anything bad happen now, it would be my responsibility to ensure it stopped immediately.

It was already a risk opening this gateway for Keith, never mind holding it open for him to bring his mate through.

The longer I waited for something to happen, the more painful my anticipation became, as only silence entered through the gateway.

Half an hour passed—then an hour passed—and then, I felt it.

Lingering dark matter approaching me from the other side of the wall.

“The doors! They’re open!” a voice startled me.

“Freedom!” a second shouted.

The thought of numerous demons waiting on the other side of this gateway brought me panic. How many were there?

I heard no footsteps, but multiple hushed voices were approaching the doors.

This was it. Time to bring more purpose to my life.

No demons squeezed through the hole. Instead, I saw three different types of entities floating into our world.

I’d only read of these beings, fascinated by their ethereal structures that moved with the wind, like toxic clouds that blew their draining energies my way.

Without any more hesitation, I slammed my staff into the ground and yelled out a familiar chant.

“*Thondra*!” my voice boomed, echoing across the landscape.

The chant, combined with my powerful staff, created a magical energy that rippled toward the cloudlike beings, tearing through their smog.

An unexpected yet familiar rush of adrenaline coursed through my veins.

It had been so long since I’d used my magic as a weapon, but it felt as good as ever surging from my body.

My sudden excitement was short-lived. The spell only seemed to make things worse!

They fought back, using their dark energy to pull at my life force.

In a matter of seconds, I felt weaker, fragile. Even gravity’s force seemed to grow with every beat of my heart, working against my body.

The strength in my knees began to falter, and with it, so did the rest of my limbs. Soon, even my familiar staff felt heavy in my grip.

But I could still see the open barrier, and it gave me the hope that kept me standing.

Only I could open the gateway, and I had promised to ensure our world would remain safe. That would be my mission to fulfill—or die trying.

Then, I saw it. The life force of these entities.

A thin layer of dark vapor surrounded them, growing as they sucked up my own energy.

Their true forms had been hiding behind a smoke screen, but I had found them out!

I redirected my focus and gathered another burst of power from within. Slamming my staff into the ground once more, I shouted my chant.

“*Thondra*!”

This time, the energetic ripple of my magic tore through their thin vapor, ripping them apart as they screamed in agony.

I had been victorious, but not without loss.

As I looked back over to the open crack in the wall, I grew wearier.

The wall had changed. Cracks formed and branched out like ice beginning to melt.

I walked back to the opening that Keith could barely squeeze through. Its size had nearly doubled.

I summoned my healing powers and began to piece together the cracks, securing the wall from total collapse.

Over time, my confidence in this situation began to slowly deteriorate along with the wall.

Every time I sealed a crack, a bigger one would appear, along with one or two more energy forces to battle.

What they lacked in strength, they gained in numbers. One by one, I took their life force, but in return, they also took a part of my energy.

The more that would pass through, the harder I fought, and the less stable I became.

BOOM!

A strong blast of energy attacked me from behind. I was thrown forward several feet and my staff tumbled out of my hand.

As I lay on my stomach, I began to notice the faint smell of charred smoke.

The blast had not only knocked me off my feet, but it had also singed my clothes and skin!

I struggled to twist my body and turn around, but I found no sign of my attacker.

The pain was unexpectedly deep and left me immobile. I couldn’t move.

I could only watch as the wall slowly chipped and crumbled.

Keith’s image flashed into my mind, his body rigid with determination while he bellowed into the sky.

If the Werewolf King had taught me anything, it was to never give up.

With jagged breaths and crippling pain, I used all my energy to crawl toward my staff.

For centuries, I had protected this wall. There was no way I would allow it to crumble!

I had given my word to protect it from harm or die trying. Today would be as good as any to keep that promise.

As my fingers finally reached the staff, more beings floated through the barrier.

I took a deep breath, gathering as much air and energy as I could. Somehow, my wavering legs pushed me up off the ground and into a proper stance.

“*THONDRA!*” I yelled, slamming the staff into the ground.

The cloudlike beings dropped out of the sky.

Exalting the rest of my energy, I chanted, “*Thatcha kendist granh. Manthra yur manthra dankki*.”

Each word took more power from me, and though my eyes were closing and my senses blurring, I forced out the last three words of the spell.

“*Manthra gruns sin*.”

I used the last of my energy on those words. As my body deflated in complete exhaustion, my eyes closed, along with the giant opening in the wall.

Then, all went black.

Pulling away from Keith’s lips took the air from my lungs.

Our embrace felt like it exceeded the limits of time, as if the only thing that mattered now was that we were together.

But something wasn’t right. Why did I feel so light, like a bubble floating through the air?

“Belle! You’re…you’re—” Keith stammered, waking me from my reverie.

Then, I opened my eyes to a world literally going up in flames.

I looked down at Keith and could not help but notice my feet were off the ground!

“Whoa, what’s happening?!” I asked, anxiety accumulating within me.

“You’re flying!” he said in wonder.

I closed my eyes in panic as I kept rising.

What if I couldn’t control this? What if I floated up beyond his reach?

“No, no. Stop!” I shouted.

And just like that, my floating body froze mid-air. Opening my eyes, I noticed my arms pulsing with blue veins.

My powers were returning!

“Come down here, Belle!” Keith shouted.

A sudden feeling of excitement poured through me. “I can levitate! This is so cool!”

I tried to direct the powers but barely moved. It felt like swimming against a current that wanted to keep me in place.

I looked around us and despair replaced all sense of excitement.

I could see the fire blazing around us, inching closer with each passing second.

“Shit…” I started to panic. I needed to get down.

As my worry grew, I again started to rise. Keith grabbed onto my feet to ensure I wouldn’t rise any higher, but it looked as though his effort was strained.

“Belle! This is not the time for flying lessons!” Keith called, concern rising in his voice.

“Don’t you think I know that?” I shouted sarcastically. “Give me a second to think!”

I took a deep breath and closed my eyes, allowing all thoughts to concentrate on lowering myself to the ground.

“Down,” I muttered, as images of feet on solid ground filled my mind.

A new feeling soon overcame me. It was like a heavy weight settling on top of my body, ushering me downward.

Soon, I felt the ground beneath my feet.

Keith caught me in his arms and pulled me close. I wanted to stay like that forever, but a heat burning hotter than Keith ever could pulled me back to reality.

The fire was closer than ever before. Sweat glistened on our skin as flames enveloped the space around us.

“I don’t know what just happened, but we don’t have time to worry about it,” Keith said sternly.

His face showed fear, but his eyes were filled with a warm hope.

Our time together wasn’t over yet. I would make sure of that!

“You’re a witch—do you think you can try to speak with Tannon telepathically?” Keith asked.

I mulled this over in my head. I could levitate and turn blue, but those things happened involuntarily, almost as a reaction.

How could I willingly activate a power I didn’t know if I even possessed?

Tannon. I have to focus on Tannon.

It was hard because I’d never met him before. How could I envision what he looked like?

I shut my eyes and focused on repeating his name in my head. Over, and over, and over…

“BELLE!” Keith shouted, his voice reverberating through my bones.

I knew from the sound of his voice that the fire was closing in.

I tried to ignore his cries and continued to focus on Tannon. There was too much at stake.

And it was all falling on my shoulders!

BELLE
Tannon… Tannon… If you can hear me… We need your help…

BELLE
Tannon! The fire will consume us. Please. Tannon! Open the gateway, we need help!

But the only response was silence…

BELLE
TANNON!

BELLE
Tannon! Please!!

TANNON
Belle?

BAM!

A burst of energy shot out from my body. I opened my eyes with hope but saw no change in our surroundings.

Then, I noticed Keith staring at me, and before my eyes followed his, I could already feel the difference inside.

My veins were pulsing blue and my body gave off a bright glow. I tried to feel the ground beneath my feet but realized I was floating again!

“Your powers…” Keith stared at me in awe, maybe even a little frightened.

I closed my eyes once more and gathered all the energy I could muster.

A voice rang out through my mind.

The barrier is opening, Belle. You have only seconds…

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THWACK!

I opened my eyes to see Keith looking toward the invisible barrier.

I followed his eyes and noticed a small hole the diameter of a pencil had begun to open.

“Belle, it’s working!” Keith cried, as a smile overcame his lips.

“We only have a few seconds to make it through!” I replied with urgency.

WHOOSH!

The sudden hole in the barrier allowed unexpected air to feed the fire. It swirled around us like a giant cyclone of flames and heat.

Keith pressed his body into mine as our safe space shrunk from the advancing fire.

The hole finally grew large enough for us to fit through one at a time.

“Now!” Keith screamed.

With a burst of power, I managed to float through the hole with ease.

I could sense Keith squeezing through behind me and was happy to see him collapsed on the ground next to me, feeling the cold earth pressed against his face.

Lying not far from Keith was the crumpled body of what I could only assume was the guardian of the barrier.

“Tannon!” I called, as we both rushed to his side.

The frail warlock looked withered and broken but glanced over at me with a softness in his violet eyes before he passed out.

He had given all of his life force to save us.

“We have to get help,” I stated, my voice shaking. “He can’t die!” I shouted.

I looked down at Tannon, an *immortal* warlock. Dying before my eyes.

Just like Gregory did.

I couldn’t let that happen. He had given his all for me, and I would do the same.

“We’re too far from Tessa. Even if I switched into my wolf form, it would take hours to get to her,” Keith stated.

“NO! We have to go to Tessa now! We CAN make it!” I screamed.

I stood up only to feel my foot kick something hard.

I could barely believe I was staring at Tannon’s staff lying on the ground at my feet.

As if by instinct, I picked it up, feeling power around and within me.

I touched the ground with the staff three times, as a phrase in the back of my head called out to me.

“Take us back,” I said, to no one in particular.

An ominous doorway suddenly appeared in front of us, with black and white energy surrounding it.

“Let’s go,” I stated, staff held tightly in my hand as I moved forward.

“No, Belle! What if it’s a trap?” Keith warned me, grabbing my wrist tightly.

I stared him dead in the eye and reclaimed my arm. Energy jolted through me—something familiar, yet so powerful it must be new.

“I know exactly where this will take me,” I said with certainty. “Pick him up and carry him through. We need to go.”