

## Mated to the Werewolf King

### Return to the Coven

We entered the portal as all the light from the world behind us disappeared.

I grew doubtful. Was Keith right that this could be just another trap?

I forced myself to step forward before my thoughts could spiral any further.

A soft glow began to emanate from Tannon's station, slowly lifting the darkness like sunlight welcoming in a new morning. A new beginning...

With a few more steps, I was through the portal and into Tessa's room.

Thank the Moon Goddess!

Something in the room moaned, bringing my hope back down to earth.

It had come from Tessa, who sat on her bed, doubled over in pain.

"Belle, you're all right!" she called out, trying to hold back the hurt in her voice.

She had barely spoken before Keith stepped into the room holding Tannon's limp body in his arms.

Tessa's eyes grew wide with sorrow.

"He's been attacked," Keith stated. "I don't know how or by what. We found him like this when we came through the barrier."

Keith lay Tannon on the same chaise where I had recovered not long ago. Tessa, still writhing with her own pain, slowly moved to her brother's side.

"I knew something was wrong," she whimpered. "We are connected by more than blood. Any time he is overcome with pain or joy, physical or emotional, I feel as he does. I cannot even begin to describe what he went through."

I saw the pain on her face and heard the sorrow in her words. Stepping forward, I placed my hands on her shoulders.

"He saved us. Without him, we would have been burned alive," I said, hoping my simple words could provide some comfort.

Tessa's features softened as she nodded her head in understanding. Using a hand, she moved it over his body from head to toe, scanning him with mysterious powers.

"He's weak but has a steady pulse. He isn't struggling to breathe now, but if he doesn't start to improve..."

Tessa stared at her brother in silence, holding back tears from her eyes.

Keith moved close to me and held my hand in his.

We watched together as Tessa brushed her fingers lightly against his cheek. A smile popped on her face.

"You left your entire back unguarded, little brother..." Tessa sighed, as she placed both hands directly above his abdomen.

A light blue energy linked the two of them.

"I nagged him about it for centuries, and he never listened."

I turned away, no longer able to watch a sister caring for her brother.

Gregory had given his life for my escape, and I would never be able to care for him like this. I would never be able to see him again.

I covered my face with a hand to hide my sadness.

Keith noticed anyway and reached out with a gentle touch. It was warm and reassuring, just as I had needed.

"Am I invited to the reunion?" a familiar voice called out.

Daisy stood in the doorway with her large hips, golden hair, and intoxicating blue eyes staring right at us.

She looked at Keith and licked her lips like a lioness waiting to pounce on her prey.

After a few swaying steps inside the room, she registered Tannon's wilted body and stopped in her tracks.

She looked as if she wanted to leave but stayed in place, staring down at him.

"Moon Goddess! Is that...? What happened to Tannon?" she asked.

"He was attacked while saving us," Keith offered.

I could see he was making an effort not to look in her direction. She noticed and moved closer.

"And to think you needed saving in the first place," she said, with a glint in her eyes. "Are you okay? You look so tired..."

I gritted my teeth, but Keith shook her off before I could respond.

"I'm fine," he said, standing closer to me.

"Would have been nice if you were there to help us out of the portal. But of course, you're never around when needed," I said, with extra bite to my words.

Tessa rose from her place beside Tannon. Everyone moved their attention to her as she stared at us with exasperation.

"Daisy, gather some of the others and bring them here. We will need all the help we can get," Tessa said commandingly.

Daisy nodded her understanding and gave one last glance to Keith before leaving.

I smiled up at him and felt for his hand, squeezing it gently.

He quickly looked down at me and smiled back.

Tessa laid her hands on the both of us and gave us a reassuring smile.

"He is fine now, but there is much to do. This must have been done by a higher ranked demon. One whose power could nearly match ours," she said, with a bit of worry in her voice.

*A demon powerful enough to take a warlock by surprise?*

Keith and I looked at one another but said nothing.

"I'm going to need some time before I can learn anything more... In the meantime, you two should eat and get some rest," Tessa said warmly.

My stomach answered with a rumble.

"I'm starving," I called, as I grabbed Keith's hand. "Maybe we can get some room service...?"

I gave him a hug as we left but couldn't help looking back.

I could see Tessa sitting by Tannon's side, holding his hand in her own as she sang softly for him.

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Keith and I shared our first meal together, alone. Luckily, Daisy had taken the hint and left us to our own devices for the time being.

The food was mouthwatering and the drink refreshing. We tried conversation but no topic seemed important enough to keep us occupied from our feast.

I ate like a ravenous creature, scarfing down anything unlucky enough to make it onto my plate.

Keith struggled to keep up and was clearly impressed with my unexpected hunger. "Maybe you really are a werewolf," he said at one point, eliciting a smile from me.

Time seemed to pass slowly, and after my appetite was sated, I could feel my eyes growing heavy.

Unpleasant thoughts began to creep into the corners of my mind, howling in the night as the moon glowed on the horizon. I could not see the source of light but knew it was not the sun.

As if he could see my thoughts, I felt Keith reach across the table for my hand.

"You're safe now, Belle," he said.

I opened my eyes and looked into his. They were as piercing as ever but a newfound empathy lay behind them.

I wanted to believe we were safe, I really did. But so many reassurances had been proven wrong.

Nothing was close to being over.

"He's still out there," I mumbled.

"And I'm right here," Keith said, leaning closer so that I could see his honesty.

I squeezed his hand and forced a smile, then dropped it. He knew better than to believe it.

"Gregory is gone," I said. "*My blood brother*. Dead by the hands of two demons."

Keith took his hand back and exhaled.

I looked to him and could see the trouble he had with expressing his feelings. He caught me looking and gave a weak smile.

"I'm sorry, Belle," he said.

Keith's words took me by surprise.

"Yesterday, I would have told you that in this life, everyone dies. Look at Tannon... Even immortals aren't guaranteed eternal life."

He took a drink to wet his tongue and gathered his thoughts.

"But today, seeing your power again... It was amazing. And it saved us."

He reached across the table and took my hand in his. The touch was familiar by now, but it still felt so right.

Tears welled in my eyes. I had lost my family, Gregory, and possibly countless more to come. But this moment with Keith dwarfed all of that.

It felt as if I had known him for a million years, not just a few days.

I had only known Gregory was my brother for a brief time and failed to make the most of it.

How different would life have been if I had known him all along?

"Belle?" Keith brought me back to the moment.

I looked to him, and warmth filled my heart.

"Thank you for finding me," I spoke sincerely.

"I had no choice," Keith said. "If I can't protect you, then what good am I as a King?"

"But I thought you weren't my King?" I asked, remembering his eagerness to rid me of our mate-pull.

"I may not be your King now, but..." He smiled as he took both my hands in his, massaging them with his thumbs.

The fire in his eyes ignited a fire inside of me, too strong to ignore.

Why should I ignore it? If life truly was so fragile, it would be important to make the most of our time together.

I leaned close and kissed his lips, feeling his tongue pressed against my own.

"Do whatever you want," I said. "Who knows if we'll have this again."