

Mated to the Werewolf King

Kidnapped

"Are you okay? Answer me, Belle!" I heard a distant voice that sounded like my brother's. *Was that Sean?* My head was throbbing with such intensity, I could hardly think straight. But then, through the blur, I saw him peering down at me.

"What happened?" I asked.

Sean sighed. "When you backed away, you tripped and fell. You must have hit your head on a rock or something, because you were out cold."

I tried to sit up, but I still felt woozy. I ran my fingers over the new tender bump on my head, remembering flashes of our conversation and the dream all over again.

The Demon Lord.

The Werewolf King.

The truth about who I really was.

I shook my head. It was still too much information to process all at once. I checked my surroundings and realized I was back in my bedroom, lying in my bed.

"You brought me back?"

Sean nodded. "Mom and Dad are waiting downstairs. Whenever you're ready."

"I don't want to see them," I said, tearing up. "I can't believe..."

"I know," Sean said, pulling me into a tight hug. "But, Belle, they're still your parents. Even if it's not biological. They love you."

Love. Something about the word reminded me of the dream again...of the Werewolf King. Had he said something to me? It didn't matter. What mattered was that everything I'd ever believed was a lie.

Who was I really, I wondered? I'd always thought of myself as the daughter of an alpha of a strong pack. Another typical she-wolf. Now, my wolf's diminutive size made sense, I guess. It made sense why I didn't resemble either my mother or my father.

But the idea that I...*belonged*...to the Demon Lord? That he was willing to wage war on all werewolves in order to get me back? I couldn't wrap my head around it.

There was only one way to find out more. I took a deep breath, looked at Sean, and nodded.

"All right," I said. "Let's go see them."

My parents were waiting in the living room for us downstairs. They both wore grave expressions as I threw myself into a chair.

"Honey, we're so glad you're all right," my Dad began.

"You shouldn't have run o like that," Mom said sternly. "Not after—"

"The Demon Lord's ultimatum?" I interrupted, watching both of their expressions ripple with shock. "Yeah, Sean told me everything."

"Sean!" Mom exclaimed.

"I'm sorry, guys," Sean said, looking aside. "But she has a right to know. She's almost eighteen years old."

"Which, apparently, is some sort of cut-o date?" I asked. "Do you mind explaining? *Mom? Dad?* Or should I call you by your first names now?"

Dad looked down, his eyes sadder than I'd ever seen them. I didn't like hurting them like this, but after being kept in the dark for so long, I was angry and needed to lash out. At anything. Anyone. These two just happened to hit the bill.

"You have a right to be angry," Mom said. "But know that we kept the way we found you a secret for a reason."

"To protect me, I know. Dad already said that."

"But not from the Demon Lord. We knew, one day...he would come back...one way or another. It was bound to happen."

"Then, from what?"

Mom and Dad looked at each other with a hint of concern. Then, Dad leaned forward.

"The truth is, our King? He is not always the most benevolent man."

"You're saying...you were protecting me from the Werewolf King? Why?!"

"He would never have approved of your adoption," Dad said. "He would have cast you out of the pack years ago, had he known."

"And now?"

"That's why we're sending you away, Belle," Mom said. "So he can't get you first."

"Do you think he would really turn me over? To the Demon Lord?"

"If it meant protecting every werewolf in the world?" Dad said, shaking his head. "I believe he would. That is King Keith's way. The greater good."

I shook my head with disbelief. And here I thought I'd only have to worry about one powerful enemy. My parents were saying *both* were bad?

Mom started tearing up, and Dad tenderly grabbed her hand. The look he gave her, it reminded me how much these two meant to me. To each other. After all these years, they were still madly in love.

Sometimes, I couldn't believe their spark still remained so alive and strong. One day, I wanted to be in love like that. But none of my fairytales were going to come true if the Werewolf King and the Demon Lord were after me.

How was I ever supposed to find my mate when my life was falling apart?

"Pack your bags, Belle," Dad finally broke the silence. "We leave first thing in the morning."

"Won't I have time to...to say goodbye? To my friends?"

They looked at each other again, then Mom shook her head.

"I don't think so, Belle. Not this time."

I could feel the tears welling up. The reality of my situation hadn't kicked in until now. Mom leaned forward to hug me, and I recoiled.

"Don't. Just...leave me alone."

Mom and Dad both nodded, stood up, and left the room, leaving me and Sean in silence. He squeezed my shoulder.

"Hey," he said. "You may get to say goodbye to one person, at least."

"You? No offense, Sean, but I was thinking more like..."

"Not me." He winked. Just then, there was a loud knock on the front door. My eyes widened, and Sean smirked.

"Relax," Sean said, walking to answer it. "The Demon Lord doesn't knock."

Very funny, Sean.

He went to the door, and who should he come back with but Gregory...the boy I was madly in love with. The one I always imagined when I thought of who my mate might be.

"Hey, Belle," he said, blushing and looking away.

Gregory was the son of the pack's beta. He was shy but in a cute sort of way. He had curly black hair that fell down to his shoulders, and vivid green eyes with long lashes. I loved watching how he twirled the locks at the back of his nape, or how he chewed the inside of his cheek whenever he was nervous.

He had a killer body, which I had ogled on many occasions, but he carried it with the uncertainty of a lanky teenager, hunching his broad shoulders and keeping his chin down.

I never understood why he was so insecure with such amazing looks.

Sean knew we were close, but he didn't know the way I *really* felt about Gregory. Or, so I thought, anyway. Something about his knowing smirk suggested otherwise.

"So," I said. "What brings you here, Gregory?"

"I guess, uh, I just wanted to check in and see how you were doing... I heard about the, uh, the ultimatum."

I stepped closer toward Gregory, to kiss his cheek, to show him how much his care meant to me—thinking, *this could be my last chance*—when we heard a commotion outside.

Wolves were howling. I could hear the scratching of their paws as they circled the house. Before I could ask what was going on, my father rushed downstairs and flew out the door. Sean and Gregory followed close behind.

"Where are you going?" I asked in vain. Then, I caught sight of my mother, her beautiful face riddled with worry.

"He's here," she said in a shaky whisper.

"Who? The Demon Lord?"

"No. The King."

I didn't like how spooked everyone was. The Werewolf King's appearance at our home was highly unusual. After what my parents had told me, I knew it could only mean one thing.

I stepped outside, and my father held out an arm to stop me.

"We're too late," he said, helpless. I couldn't bear to see this despair on his face. He was the pack's alpha, and any emotion besides supreme confidence was cause for alarm.

I have to be strong for all of us. Even if I'm not this man's real daughter, I was still raised as an alpha pup, and I know how to act like one.

"It's okay, Dad. Take me to meet the King."

"I won't let him take you away from us. I swear to you, Belle."

But this was one promise we both knew he couldn't keep. The Werewolf King was the alpha of all the alphas, and no one, including my father, had the power to disobey him.

I took a deep breath and walked forward, past my father. My legs trembled as adrenaline surged through me.

Sean and Gregory had already shifted into their wolf forms, while other members of the Pack began to appear in small groups, working themselves into a frenzy, baring their teeth and nipping at each other. Their soulful howls rose to the heavens, paying tribute to the Moon Goddess, asking for strength and bravery.

When they saw me, they rushed to my side, forming a ferocious shield of fangs and vicious growls. They were a loyal pack of soldiers and would lay down their lives to protect me, the alpha's daughter.

If only they knew the truth.

"This is all very noble, but I would stand down if I were you..."

The warning came from a voice with a deep timbre. Behind the shield of wolves, I couldn't see the man it belonged to, but his voice alone was enough to make my heart tremble and my legs give out. I felt dizzy.

Is he doing this to me, or is it my own nerves?

"Please, my King," my father growled. "She's my daughter. We can't—"

"Step aside!" shouted the King, this time issuing an alpha command that not even the strongest mind could withstand.

Within seconds, all the wolves except for Sean and my father submitted, bowing their heads.

My brother and father were resisting the order with all their might. They struggled to tolerate the explosive pain in their heads.

My father pressed his fingers to his temples, wrenching his head from side to side like his mind was being eaten from within.

I couldn't bear to see my family like this. I pushed myself forward and threw up my hands.

"Stop it! Stop it, please! You can have me. Just don't hurt them any more!" I cried out.

Sean howled, collapsing to the ground, finally free from whatever torture the King had made him endure. I looked to my father, who lay motionless in the dirt.

"He will be fine," the King growled. "Now, come here, girl. Let me see you."

I finally turned to see the King in all his colossal wonder.

He had daunting black eyes with such depth, it felt like you could fall and keep falling into them forever. His eyelashes were thick, his jaw chiseled as if from stone.

I found myself drawn to him by some mysterious pull, wanting to know him on every level. His broad shoulders, muscular chest, and ripped abs heaved with his every breath. I couldn't stop staring, feeling, imagining...

Hold on. What the hell is happening to me?!

I shook myself out of my stupor. He was the enemy. Look what he'd done to my father and brother! He was here to *take me away*.

"So, you're Belle, are you?" he asked.

All I could do was nod in response. There was a hint of a smile on his lips, a glint in his eyes, as if he knew something about me I didn't.

For a second, I remembered the faraway dream in which the Werewolf King lay dying, whispering four words to me: "Belle, I love you."

How could this man, this beast, this King ever love me? It was impossible. Without another word, he morphed into the largest wolf I had ever seen. Then, he threw me onto his back with one lethal paw.

I was powerless to resist him. I spun to see Sean and my father howling in heartbreak. But there was nothing I could do.

Suddenly, I felt myself flying through the air. The trees flashed by in a blur as I gripped desperately to the King's fur.

I had no idea where he was taking me...but I knew, from here on forth, my life would never be the same.