The Vampire King

"How hard did you hit the poor thing?"

An unfamiliar voice surfaced in my awareness.

I tried to move but everything hurt, especially my head. A moan escaped my lips as I tried unsuccessfully to turn over.

"Seel! She's still alive! That's good for something, right?" a second voice called.

"That'll be all," the nt one dismissed.

With a heavy grunt, I nally plopped onto my stomach and was able to use my hands to push up from the ground.

I felt the soft fabric beneath me and could hear the humming of a light from afar. A searing pain in my head forced me to open my eyes.

I could see that I was on a rug. It was expensive and intricate, the colors dancing across my eld of vision, blurring my sight.

"Ow, what the hell…?" I muttered, while my eyes adjusted to the blaring ouroescent lighting in the room.

I took in my surroundings, completely confused as to how and when I got here.

The room I was currently in had a very open loft with high ceilings and fans slowly spinning above me.

It was quite the upgrade from the cave Keith and I had slept in.

Then, I noticed, Keith was nowhere to be seen.

"Keith!? KEITH!" I shouted.

"He's not here," said a voice, startling me.

"Moon Goddess!" I said, trying to stand and run.

My head swam with confusion, sending my body crashing back down to the carpet.

I looked to my right and noticed a boy maybe two or three years younger than me sitting on a bright yellow sofa.

"Hello, Annabelle. Sorry for such an…intrusive welcoming," he said, drinking red wine out of a large glass.

He was well dressed, with jet black hair swooped back to highlight his lime green eyes.

"My name is Samuel," he said with a ourish.

It wasn't until he set his wine glass down that I noticed the liquid encased was much thicker than wine, almost viscous.

As he glared at me, I could see how it stained his upper lip, and my stomach turned.

"Are you drinking blood?" I asked, holding back the last bits of rabbit from dinner.

Samuel's expression dropped into an ungodly sigh. He collected himself and licked the blood o of his lips.

"Yes, I am… After all, I am a vampire."

"The Vampire King," I said, staring at him in awe.

Samuel nodded and gave a small clap. "There you are… Right on point."

I took another look around the room and couldn't help but notice we were alone. Of course, they always wanted to be alone.

"What did you do with Keith?" I demanded.

"We left him behind. He is no threat to me…as long as he doesn't do anything foolish," Samuel stated.

"Are you asking for a death wish? He'll come for me," I said, lacking con dence.

I knew Keith no longer remembered me and wouldn't know where to begin looking.

I tried to push away the thoughts, but I couldn't see it turning out any other way. If he had only marked me…

"So, you think I'll be your mate, too!?" I asked with a sigh.

Samuel's laughter caught me o -guard.

"No, not at all," he assured. "It's true, I'm supposed to be mated to you. Perhaps there could be something there…but I am not a monogamous man."

"You're younger than I am," I chortled.

Samuel let out another bitter volley of laughter and shook his head. "Oh, goodness, no, I'm decades beyond your time, but I forgive you for that."

Something about his energy was eccentric and suave. It spoke to me as a muse to a poet.

But there was something else, an underlying feeling…

I tried to clear my thoughts and break the pull I felt coming from Samuel. He didn't want me like the others did. Maybe that was why it seemed so much stronger…

"I'm here to o er you something di erent…something I can't imagine anyone would reject. You are a free woman, it is your undoing," he said, with a hiss.

"If I'm a free woman, why did you force me here?" I asked.

"Would you have come if you heard the Vampire King wanted your attention?" Samuel countered.

I sat there in silence. He took my pause as a response.

"Exactly," he said, sipping his glass of blood once more. "It's true, we did not want to take any chances with the Werewolf King. But it was not my intention for you to be hurt."

Overhead, through the ventilation shaft, a faint metallic thud rustled back and forth, almost rhythmic.

I looked around the room for answers when Samuel waved a dismissive hand.

"Renovations. The workers are constantly pounding and cutting, but we must be ready to expand if indeed we have a new queen," he said seductively.

Samuel sat down at an old grand piano that stood in the corner of the room.

"Do you like music?" he asked, playfully stroking a few keys.

I nodded, unable to rid myself of the sounds his piano made.

He smiled and began to play more of the notes, merging them into soft chords that carried a peaceful melody throughout the room.

I couldn't help but sway my head to the sensual sounds.

"My o er to you is…well, whatever you'd like. With my mark, you could have peace, fortune, and a voice in this world."

Though my heart was set on Keith, I couldn't help but listen to his pitch. It was something Laserus had been so good at, trying to sell me on a broken dream.

And yet, wasn't that what I wanted? To go my own route and answer to no one else…?

"How can you give me all of that?" I asked him.

"By showing you who you really are," Samuel answered, crossing one leg over the other.

Something about his starry-eyed gaze brought me so much inspiration. He was willing to help me be me?

I laughed at the idea, but it was still a possibility. No violent behavior, no obsessive devotion to having me in his bed, not even an ounce of interest.

Keith had lost his memory, and I needed to understand there was a possibility he would never retrieve it.

"So, what do you think?" Samuel asked, bringing me back to the moment. He stopped playing music and looked to me with keen eyes.

"Before I make any decision, what do you get out of all of this?" I asked him.

Samuel shrugged. "Well, I heard about your lover's quarrel with the Demon Lord and…"

"It was not a quarrel, it was hell. He was going to force me into being marked! And did you know, he has a brother? Because that was news to me, too," I snapped.

"Okay…" Samuel stood up from his seat and sauntered toward the windows. "I had heard about your grand exit from the underworld, and I was intrigued."

He looked out the window, swirling his glass as though he were drawing oxygen into the blood.

"No one's stood up to him like that, and I wouldn't say I side with the werewolves, but I admire your willingness to stand on your own," he admitted, with a sip of blood.

He winked at me, and I could feel my skin blush. I tried to cover it by turning away, but Samuel was suddenly next to me.

"If you will be my queen, we could ensure the Demon Lord and the entire underworld stays far from ours," he said, pointing a hand out over the room.

I shook my head and suddenly could hear the notes of his song playing throughout the room.

He grabbed my hand and we began to slow-dance.

"Think of the power shift we would have over them," he continued.

"There would be more than just a barrier separating the two. If I were to mark you…if you were to let me mark you…it would make it more probable to establish peace among all the other clans."

Peace.

After all the horror I had seen over the last few days, it seemed like an impossible feat. But if it were possible, wouldn't it be something to consider?

I broke away from our dance and sat down on the couch.

While I was running in circles with Keith, ghting against The Demon Lord and Azazel at all costs, Samuel was planning something long-lasting.

Something that would give me more purpose.

The Queen of the Vampires…

I snapped out of my daze. "If you mark me, that means I won't be able to go outside anymore."

"Yes, but you'd learn to get used to it, like we all did," Samuel said.

"It really doesn't make a di erence being in the underground. We have everything you need right here. And if we don't, I'll make sure to nd it and bring it back!" he said in an exalted voice.

I gazed into his eyes and felt the mate pull grow between us.

It made me feel as though the room around us ceased to exist, like time had stopped, and we were the ones in control.

It took every ounce of my body to break the eye contact.

"And if I say no?" I asked.

Samuel didn't inch even though I looked hard into his eyes, hoping to nd any sense of falsehood.

"You will be free to go."

"I don't know what to say, Samuel," I said with confusion. "My heart is set on Keith…"

Hearing those words leave my mouth had me feeling all sorts of ways.

It bothered me, how much I wanted to be close to his lips, his hands, his everything!

Samuel sized me up and observed my body. "But he didn't mark you."

My heart sank. Samuel was right.

I couldn't blame this on his memory loss. He had known me before and he'd left me naked and alone.

I had started to see a change in the cave, but how long would that have lasted before he took on his old ways?

"We're just waiting for the right time," I protested.

"When will you learn, dear Belle, that any time spent with you is never wrong?"

WHACK!

Searing pain shot through my entire body as what must have been the hundredth lash of a whip laced with wolfsbane.

I hung from a high ceiling by chains of silver that burned my wrists.

WHACK!

The whip sliced through my skin, leaving another raised welt, oozing blood.

"WHAT DO YOU WANT!?" I shouted between lashes.

"Enough," a slithery voice called out from the shadows.

The lashing stopped, and I could hear footsteps approaching.

A gure emerged from the shadows, a young boy with a pristine posture.

He smiled at me with his twisted expression and tilted his head. "Hello, Keith. Long time no see."

I growled at the boy standing below me.

I may have lost my memory, but his shit-eating grin caused my anger to seethe.

"I believe you have something worth value to me. This little inconvenience should remind you of how persistent I am in getting my way," he said with a smile.

My blood boiled to the point I could barely feel the silver chains piercing my wrists.

I had never been true enemies with a vampire, not that my feeble mind could recall. But it was obvious we were never friends either.

Vampires only did what suited their interests and were good at pretending otherwise.

"Why am I here?" I growled.

"You have something I want. Or rather, someone…" Samuel said.

"Belle?" I asked. "What have you done with her?!"

"Believe me, I have treated Belle like a queen," he slithered.

"Let her go. Make her realize you have forgotten her, that she is not worth your time, and I will release you. It's as simple as that," he suggested.

"I don't trust you!" I growled. "You only care about yourself, and I won't listen to your lies!"

I tried again to break from the chains but only managed to bruise my wrists even more.

Samuel laughed at the show. "I know you don't trust me. But you should trust this… if I don't get what I want…you won't be the only one dripping blood."