The Missing Queen

"Belle! Where are you?!" I screamed one last time into the night sky.

My voice was struggling from the hours of yelling, but it would not stop until I found her, even if that meant losing my voice.

After nding her missing nearly two nights ago, I had ordered my men to search the entire kingdom.

But, as fate would have it, there was no trace. Her scent had dissipated long ago.

Still, I wondered, how long had she been gone? If I found out Lasarus had taken her once again, I would rip him to shreds using only my teeth!

But I feared her disappearance wasn't by anyone's hands but her own.

"She's gone, my King," Xavier said. "We've searched everywhere."

He was waiting for me in the main hall of my castle along with a dozen of my army.

"Well, where could she have gone? Did NO ONE see her leave?!" I shouted.

Everyone looked around the room. They were useless, all of them!

I marched back to my bedroom and closed the door, hoping to nd some peace.

Zena was no longer there, but her scent lingered in the air, making my stomach turn.

It was not her fault I had lost my memory and let her get close. But I now understood I would never let her get so close again.

If I could not nd Belle, no one would...

If it were not for Zena's advances, I wondered if I would have ever gotten my memory back.

The desire she had unearthed in my body while I sat on my throne gave rise to a connection that jumpstarted every last memory I possessed.

And I understood why Belle had left, I had understood from the beginning, but I refused to believe my actions were wrong.

A King did not make mistakes...

I laughed at such a stupid thought. In the short time I had gotten to know Belle, mistakes were all I seemed to have made.

Not all was bad. There was a time before the magic a ected me that I had nearly marked her as my queen...

My eyes grew wide as I lost the feeling in my chest and had to sit down.

The magic!

I had remembered everything, but with Belle's sudden disappearance, some of the memories were pushed aside.

The last person I remembered seeing was Daisy!

I had to warn Tessa.

As I grabbed my bag and headed back toward the main hall, I convinced myself, going to Tessa's would only help my mission.

I found Xavier in the hall and waved him over.

"I need to see Tessa," I said. "We need to begin our journey now."

Xavier moved quickly to gather men for our trip.

I bit my lip and decided not to wait.

Shifting into wolf form, I ran at full speed ahead. The faster I could travel, the faster I would be able to warn Tessa about Daisy.

Surely, she would be able to help me nd Belle in return.

Then, I could take Belle home, where she belonged.

With me.

I looked at myself in the mirror and inched.

I was never one to worry about super cial things such as the perception of my looks...but I had to admit, I looked much better than only a few days prior.

The surprise blast tore me from my feet and nearly took the life from my body.

The sensation that overtook my body was similar to one I felt when I was much younger.

We had learned o ensive spells in school, practicing them on one another. The di erence was, those were implemented in smaller doses.

Whatever hit me was a much higher-powered version.

The last time I had been so brutally attacked, it happened when Tessa and I were experimenting with black magic back in the early seventeenth century.

I'd gotten quite arrogant at that time and was not afraid to let everyone else know.

Tessa warned me that my hubris would only end in pain. She knew I never watched my back and was worried that would be my undoing.

It soon came to pass...

I had boasted too much one evening, and a fellow student, drunk with mead, let me know with a blast to the back of my head.

It was entirely my fault, but my pain had nearly destroyed her.

I was unconscious for weeks, and she, nearly the same—doubled over, nearly immobile due to our magical connection.

I had recovered stronger than ever, but black magic wasn't something to experiment with.

Especially not when you were naïve, six hundred years old, and living in the prime of witch sightings among humans.

Whoever struck me down recently had enough knowledge of dark magic to sneak up on me and was strong enough to knock me down.

For centuries, I had not wanted to believe a witch defecting to the underworld was possible—not one of our coven.

But it seemed more and more possible that we had lost one of our own to the Demon Lord.

"You're up!" Tessa's voice sounded in the room. "You are looking better with each passing day."

She moved to a chair and sat down, careful not to spill her tea.

She still looked as young as I, but her eyes had numerous dark circles encompassing them.

Tessa had used much of her own lifeforce in order to heal mine.

"What's happened?" I asked, looking around the room for my sta .

"Nothing today, dear brother..." Tessa said, her voice trailing o .

"But you have that look, sister," I said, with a hint of satisfaction.

I could always tell when something was on her mind, even if I could not always read it.

"I fear we are only witnessing the calm before the storm," she admitted. "Do you remember what attacked you?"

I thought for a moment if I should tell her my worries and decided she would nd out sooner or later.

I could already see her eyes piercing my body.

"I don't know what it was...but I worry it is someone close to us." I said, with a hint of secrecy. "Whatever hit me, whoever hit me, used dark magic."

Tessa took a moment to digest this, along with another sip of her tea.

It had been a long time since I last saw her, but one thing that would probably never change was our love for tea.

Today, she was drinking it from a cup I bought for her back in the fteenth century. I didn't expect it to last this long, but I was attered she had kept it all these years.

"Dark magic?" Tessa asked. "That's quite an assumption, Tannon. But I can't say I didn't sense dark matter in your aura while clearing it..."

She lost herself in deep thought as she stared at the ground.

"But who would do something like that?"

"Who is guarding the gate to the underworld now?" I asked.

"Daisy," Tessa said.

Within seconds, her eyes lled with realization. "You don't think...?"

Before I could answer, my sta stood erect and shot across the room, straight into my hand.

I caught it out of instinct and looked to Tessa, her eyes wide.

She nodded, with a hint of fear etched onto her face.

"We need to warn the others."

I couldn't believe how easy it all was.

Ripping Belle and Keith apart, gaining the old witch's trust, and sneaking up behind Tannon.

It had been years in the making but felt like it took only hours to bring it all down.

All I had to do was make sure they saw me at the house, eat with them, and pretend I had some sort of attachment to them.

The witches were smart—I knew that nthand.

Years of servitude to the Moon Goddess and the passive demeanor of our Priestess Tessa dulled their senses. This allowed me to go along with my daily duties unnoticed.

And whenever I was gone? They didn't seem to really even care...

My Demon Lord would be so proud of me. I yearned for his reward.

It was he I had longed for from the moment we met nearly fty years ago.

We found ourselves intrigued by each other's di erences, always returning to each other for our one shared interest: Bringing back dark magic.

I had learned only a little during my time in school. They refused to give us more than we could handle.

But that all changed after our chance meeting, when we knew we wanted nothing more than to be with one another.

Lasarus had taught me many things that gave me a power the other witches couldn't even dream of possessing.

It had taken a bit of time and a lot of concentration, but I managed to open the gateway.

I laughed at the thought of Tannon, the great warlock, splayed on the ground face- rst.

I was not as powerful as him yet, though I could feel my strength growing by the second.

I stepped through the threshold between the worlds and felt a sense of heightened awareness coursing through my veins. The power that awaited me was calling my name.

I could feel the dark magic pulling at my energy, yearning for my body to be used as its vessel.

Suddenly, a faint rumbling from the distance sounded, approaching me from the underworld kingdom.

Numerous demons galloped across the ery plains by the hundreds, all waiting to cross.

Soon, both worlds would become one, and I would reign superior alongside my one true love. Nothing could stand in our way.

"You've done so well, Daisy," I heard him call before I saw him.

That beautifully crafted voice I had grown to lust over sent shivers through me every time it said my name.

The demons made a clearing as Lasarus stepped into my space with pure delight in his eyes.

He looked around to his subordinates.

"It is time to take back what was always ours!" he screamed at the frothing, vicious hoard. "Let us unite the underworld with the human world and claim our freedom!"

He pointed a nger forward, and the demons charged through the open barrier.

I marveled at the sight of the demons cheering and ooding through the opening, o into the daylight.

As they rumbled into the distance, I stood still with Lasarus, a burning passion in my eyes.

"I did what you asked of me, my Lord," I said, as I touched his chest. "Will you ful ll your promise and nally make me yours?"

The Demon Lord stood with a stoic posture, his arms folded as he considered this.

"You are not my mate, Daisy...you know this," he said. "Your purpose is ful lled. Now, you have the freedom to reign where you like."

"What?!" I asked in shock. "But you said you would mark me! That's all I ever wanted from you!"

Lasarus glared deep into my eyes. "As long as Belle is unmarked, she is mine," he said and dismissed me with a wave of his hand.

Lasarus began to walk toward the opening of the gateway as if I had never been standing by his side.

"That stupid girl is probably dead!" I shrieked. "And there are how many of you ghting over her?"

Lasarus stopped in his tracks and spun around to face me.

"You promised you would mark me. That I would reign by your side as Queen!" I screamed at the top of my lungs. "Do it, or I will warn them all about what you've done!"

Lasarus laughed, and the sound of it took my breath away.

"Who do you think they'll be angry with...me, or you?" he said with a sneer.

I felt my rage growing and lunged forward.

He had anticipated this and moved with supernatural speed.

I felt the blood before I could see it.

My hands went to my throat and found a gash the length of my neck.

His blade struck like lightning, and it left me speechless.

I tried to speak but there were no words that could form in my mouth.

"Foolish girl. How dare you challenge me?!" he shouted. "But don't fear, my love...you will be remembered for your sacri ce."

I dropped to the charred ground, trying to cover the slit in my neck.

My mind sought for a spell that would stop this, but I had already lost too much blood and could barely put my thoughts together.

I was dying faster than I could heal myself.

As I took my last breath and closed my eyes, I was comforted by my undying hatred of Belle.

I hoped she would live a life of misery and prayed I would meet her again one day in hell.