

Mated to the Werewolf King

A Royal Betrayal

I didn't get to say goodbye.

That's all I could think as the Werewolf King rode on, carrying me to whatever future lay ahead. My father, my mother, my brother—I didn't know if I would ever see any of them again.

To think, the last thing I'd said was that they weren't my real family. It made me sick with myself. If only I'd told them how I really felt...that I loved them. That they were my world.

Now, all I had to hold on to was the fur on the King's back.

The King. How I despised him. His ravishing looks didn't fool me; the man was the definition of cutthroat. He was willing to dispose of whoever got in his way.

Including me.

After hours of clutching onto him for dear life, I didn't know how much more I could endure.

I was exhausted and famished. At points, I considered letting go, falling and cracking my neck, anything to escape the fate that lay ahead of me.

But I didn't have the courage to die. Not today. Finally, thankfully, the King came to a stop, and before I could climb o , he began to shift.

Within seconds, I lay in his naked arms, staring up into those black eyes. His bare, powerful chest heaved with exertion. In his eyes, I thought I sensed a trace of compassion. Of interest.

But then he blinked and threw me aside, grabbing a pair of trousers and slipping them on, addressing his men. Back to business.

"We rest here! Make camp!" he shouted.

I tried to hobble away, to nd shelter in the cold dark of night, but I felt a hand grip my arm.

"Not so fast," the King said. "Where do you think you're going?"

I turned to him, suddenly remembering what he'd done to my father and Sean, to *me*, and felt a volcanic rage boil up within me.

"Let go of me," I hissed.

"You dare give your King orders?"

"No King of mine would have acted the way you have. To his own men. His own alpha."

His eyes narrowed and his nostrils ared. "You think you know everything, do you?"

"I know where you're taking me. You're giving me up to the Demon Lord. To keep peace. For the 'greater good.'"

"You would rather I let every werewolf die? So you may live?"

When he put it like that, I didn't know what to say. I looked aside, feeling ashamed all of a sudden. Sel sh.

"No," I admitted. "You have to do what you have to do."

"Belle."

I turned, surprised to hear my name on his lips. The rst time, it had been purely logistical; a way to con rm my identity. This time...

This time, I didn't know what I was supposed to feel.

"I am not a monster," he said, "I must appear that way to you now. But I assure you...I only hurt those who defy me. I am the King, after all. I cannot back down. Ever."

"What if I refuse? To back down?" I said, staring him straight in the eye.

"Then you would force my hand."

"You would hurt me."

"I wouldn't enjoy it."

Before I could stop myself, I ung a hand at his face to slap him. He was so fast, I didn't even see him move. His hand was around my wrist, gripping it tight—so tight...it hurt.

"Please," I begged.

"I warned you, did I not?" he growled.

For a second, I thought he was going to snap my wrist in half. His eyes burned with a rage I didn't know him capable of.

I fell to my knees. I had never known pain so excruciating in my life. But I refused to let a single tear escape my eye.

I wouldn't give him that satisfaction.

Just when I thought I couldn't take it anymore, I heard a voice in the distance.

"Keith, let her go. She's had enough!"

The King glared at the man who yelled. But, much to my relief, he nally let me go.

I grabbed my wrist, feeling it swell already. Then, he turned sharply and stomped away.

"Are you okay?" asked one of the King's warriors, with unexpected kindness in his eyes. "You should get a handle on those outbursts if you want to stay alive. Don't push him."

"He is a beast," I seethed.

"That, he is," he sighed. "But that's what makes him so good at being our King. I'm sorry, I forgot to introduce myself. I'm Xavier."

When I attempted to say my name, he stopped me with a hand gesture. "I know who you are. You're the mystery girl the Demon Lord wants," he chuckled.

"Something like that," I said.

He handed me a blanket, and I covered myself, grateful.

I was going to ask him where we were going when the King returned. He had washed himself. His hair was wet. Small droplets cascaded down his sculpted chest to his torso before disappearing beneath his trousers and...

No, no! It's happening again. Control yourself, Belle!

He caught me staring and gave a wicked grin.

I immediately looked away, disgusted with myself. How could I be attracted to the man who had hurt my brother, my father, and me, just a few moments ago?

But some uncontrollable urge inside my chest drew me to him. Made me crave his touch; made the most intimate parts of me warm with desire.

"Come," he said, nodding to me. "You will sleep in my tent tonight."

I took a step back, eyes widening.

"So I may keep an eye on you," he corrected my train-of-thought. "Can't have you running o now, can we?"

He nodded to Xavier with thanks, then escorted me into a large tent. I expected a most decadent setting, t for a king, but the adornments were simple and spartan.

He saw himself as a warrior rst, clearly.

"You will sleep here," he said, nodding to a small bed that had been made up. "Don't try to escape. I have guards watching the tent."

Then, without another word, the King collapsed on his larger bed and almost immediately fell asleep. The run must have really taken it out of him.

Looking at him—quiet now, peaceful—I felt my disgust and anger subsiding...and curiosity taking their place.

Who was this Werewolf King, anyway? He was alternately terrifying one second and considerate the next.

He was gorgeous and monstrous. Powerful and pitiful. A contradiction I longed to truly understand.

But not tonight.

No. Whether guards were watching or not, tonight, I intended to escape...

I waited for the guard on patrol to turn a corner before I dashed out of the tent and ran for the tree line.

I'd timed it just right. The Werewolf King and his warriors would never nd me.

I was going to escape and see my family tonight.

Or, that's what I thought.

Because, as I stopped at a tree to catch my breath, I saw them. In the darkness, red eyes glowing, all around.

What are they?!

They seemed to swarm all around me, their skin slick with an oily, glowing substance.

For a second, they almost looked like...

But they couldn't be, could they? The Demon King would wait until I was eighteen years old. Surely, he wouldn't be sending his minions after me now...would he?

But then, I saw one of the creatures grinning demonically, eyes xed on me.

It stepped closer. Closer. It stretched a hand toward me, and even though it stood ten meters away, the arm kept stretching, impossibly long and elastic, until its ugly black, oily hand was about to tear at my face.

I was done for.

I was just about to shift into my wolf form and try to make my escape, when a big jaw closed around his neck, ripping open his throat. Green jelly spewed through the air.

The King had come to my rescue. And suddenly, the King's men were everywhere, ghting every demon in sight.

For a second, I was almost grateful. Until I remembered he'd gotten me into this mess in the rst place.

When the creatures were all disposed of, I stepped out of the shadows and approached Xavier.

"Are you okay?" he asked.

"I am," I replied. "Are these...?" I expected Xavier to nish the sentence.

"Demons," he nodded.

"Were they here for me?"

"Probably. You've never seen them before? Wait until you see a nymph!"

At rst, I thought Xavier was joking. But his expression made it clear—he wasn't.

I was so stunned, I couldn't speak. There were beings in this world than I could ever have possibly imagined. One of which had already tried to kill me.

"We're leaving," the King growled as he approached. "Unless, of course, you want to try escaping again."

The asshole hadn't even asked me how I was. But then, a thought crossed my mind.

"Why did you ght for me?" I asked. "Why not just let them have me?"

The King looked away.

Had he changed his mind? Was he not going to hand me over to the Demon Lord after all? Why else would he have fought so ferociously to defend me?

Maybe there was more to the King than met the eye.

As the sun cast its vivid hues of oranges and yellows across the sky, slowly disappearing beneath the horizon, we nally stopped at the base of a majestic castle.

The King hollered to the werewolves on the wall, and the massive gate before us opened, revealing a gorgeous female, who rushed toward us with her thick auburn hair ying behind her.

She threw herself at the king, wrapping her legs around his waist and locking her mouth to his, thrusting her hands into his thick black hair.

For reasons I couldn't explain, it made me burn with jealousy. I wanted to rip this woman's heart out.

Moon Goddess, why does this keep happening?

I didn't want the King. Far from it. And yet my body seemed to have other ideas.

"Xavier," I asked, turning to the warrior. "Who is she? The bitch?"

"That bitch is my sister, Zena," laughed Xavier. "Don't worry, she is a bitch," he reassured, after seeing the embarrassed look on my face.

Zena left a trail of kisses along the King's jaw, making my stomach twist in envy and disgust. I couldn't believe it. It was actually making me nauseous.

She turned and eyed me up and down.

"Who's the girl?"

He considered me, and for a moment, I thought his traveling hands and lust-lled eyes were imagining what he might do to me.

"Somebody...singular," he said.

Zena didn't seem to like that answer because she pulled back and frowned. "Singular, how?"

"She's the rst woman ever to defy me."

Now, Zena understood, and her lips curled into a cruel smile.

"Did she, now?"

"She even tried to escape me, can you believe that?"

"Unforgivable."

"I don't know about that," the King muttered, with a playful icker in his eyes. "But a little time in the dungeon may do the trick."

"What?!" I screamed.

"Keith, is that really necessary?" Xavier protested.

The King didn't bother answering. He turned and continued to make out with his woman.

"I hope the Moon Goddess strikes you down, you heartless animal!" I cried, as two of his warriors dragged me away by the arms.

I tried to catch Xavier's eye, but he wouldn't look at me.

I shot my eyes back to the wretched King one last time. His mouth was buried in Zena's neck, but his eyes were watching me, unblinking.

And for a second, the look in the Werewolf King's eyes made it clear as the full moon above us.

He wished he was kissing *me*...