

Journey to the Coven

Breaking glass.

Flames engulfing the throne.

The glowing red eyes of the Demon Lord.

I awoke with such a start it felt like I was levitating.

But my reality was much too sobering.

There was no Demon Lord.

The throne wasn't burning.

And I was still in the dungeon of the Werewolf King with nothing but a lantern and some blankets.

That about summed up my luck.

Not to mention the horribly putrid smell that penetrated my nostrils. I almost retched on the ground but managed to hold it in.

Maybe it was a good thing I hadn't eaten.

Shapes continued to shift from the lantern's glow. Sweat dripped from my brow.

But something felt off. Then again, everything did at this point.

"That didn't feel like a dream," I said to the empty chamber.

I stood and stretched, feeling my muscles ache with a wonderful burn. The blankets from Xavier gave me extra cushion. It helped give me a boost of energy but not much else. A few vertebrae popped as I rose from touching my palms to the ground.

CLICK.

CREAK.

The door swung open with a grunt, and I heard heavy footfall on the stone steps.

"Good. You're up. We have much to do and far to go," Keith said.

Keith looked at me with his dark eyes, making my head swim and my stomach somersault into knots.

If he was not my mate, how did he have such a pull on me? I wanted to wrap my arms around his broad shoulders and feel his tongue tangled with mine.

I bit my lip to try and stop whatever power he held over me.

"And where do you think you're taking me?" I asked.

I could see the invisible fire burn behind his eyes. He stepped forward with a deep growl and pounded a fist on the stone wall.

"Why do you defy me? I have never in my life—"

"Never, what? Met a woman that didn't do your every bidding like Zena? It'll be a challenge. But as long as I'm here, you'll have to get used to it."

He looked at me hard, savoring the insubordination even though it angered him.

I turned away, feeling another tinge of lust I didn't want. That I didn't think I could control.

"You are not my mate." His words pierced me with pain as sharp as his claws. "Yet you unlock something uncontrollable inside me. Something I've never felt."

"Then, tell me why you are so terrible to one of your own kind?"

His laugh bellowed, hurting worse than his claws ever could.

Such a gentleman!

"The werewolves' blood lineage goes back centuries. And I am one of the most ancient of my kind."

"Our kind," I said with a hiss.

Why couldn't he get that through his thick skull? I was one of him!

"You are no werewolf."

I couldn't stop myself from hitting his chest.

The king laughed and grabbed my wrist. Pain shot through my arm and into my brain.

He leaned forward. I inhaled his musk, and the pain began to subside.

"You have powerful magic, I will give you that. When you shift, it may fool the others, but I know."

He leaned forward and inhaled. His perfect smile was both wicked and alluring, captivating me even in my moment of peril.

"I can smell the others. They are like me. But on you...there is no scent that tells me you are one of us."

He tossed away my hand, and I cradled it.

I was warned what defiance would bring. The pain was excruciating, but I refused to let him see me like this.

With a pained smile, I showed my strength as he started his way up the steps.

Two guards moved to usher me forward. I elbowed them away and took the steps of my own accord, feeling their presence the entire way.

Xavier was outside the castle with a group of men. He saw me exit and nodded.

My heart filled with warmth and the ache in my muscles felt better. Who would have guessed the healing powers of his kindness?

The feeling didn't last long as Keith barked more orders.

"We will visit the Wiccan Priestess. It will be a long journey, but we must be fast. No stopping. For anyone." His eyes shot in my direction.

I opened my mouth but saw Xavier standing behind Keith, shaking his head, *no*.

Thanks to the Moon Goddess if I make it out of this without losing my tongue... I thought again of Zena sucking on his, and it sent shivers up my spine.

But I had more pressing issues to worry about at the moment.

"Who is this Wiccan Priestess, and why should I even care?" I asked.

Some of the men laughed but Keith's clenched jaw shut them up.

"The Priestess is one of the oldest beings on earth. She is a witch, and her knowledge is vast. We are going for answers."

"So, you want to see if she can notice my scent? Since you can't seem to place it?" My tongue had extra bite today.

"We are already late. Can this quarrel not wait until we know why the Demon Lord is even after her?" Xavier said, stopping the monster in his tracks.

He was right. There were more pressing issues. And what seemed like a long journey.

Made longer by being around the monster.

I couldn't help but think of my family. I missed the stubborn guardianship of Sean. The gentle, knowing guidance of my mom and dad. What would they say in this moment? I could almost hear them talking to me. Soothing me.

But those thoughts were suddenly ripped away as Keith stepped in front of me.

"It's time. Do your magic, witch. But don't think you can escape. Shift and try to keep up."

I ground my teeth in anger as I watched the King shift into a massive werewolf, twice the size of anything I would have hoped to become.

This realization only angered me more.

I focused, and in moments, red hair covered my body. I roared into the sky.

It was time to show them who I really was.

BOOM!

Our group roared across the vast plains. Each step pounded the ground like thunder in the sky.

My claws tore at the ground, sending chunks of grass flying in my wake.

I wasn't as fast as them, but I had managed to keep within view.

At first, it was fun, almost relaxing. My muscles were still sore from the dungeon, but each step offered more and more relief.

Until we kept running...

My breathing became choked. I could feel every heave of my lungs for oxygen coming up with less and less.

Eyesight that had never failed me began to give way, leaving dark spots that blurred my vision.

I stumbled but caught myself. The humiliation of being left behind was too strong to overcome. I wouldn't lose. I couldn't!

That was when I lost the feeling in my legs.

Stumbling one last time, I caught a glimpse of the pack in the distance before I felt my body hit the ground.

Annabelle. Come back to me.

His red, glowing eyes burned in the darkness as the flames rose.

Annabelle. It's me. Your mate.

I wouldn't go to him. I couldn't!

And then I opened my eyes to see another.

The one who had never shown kindness to me.

The Werewolf king himself, lips only inches from touching mine.

He noticed my open eyes and a smile moved over his face. "I thought I had lost you. And I can't let that happen," he cooed.

That was all I had ever wanted to hear. But not coming from the king himself.

I smiled. It was the only thing I could do.

In that moment, I could almost feel his lips pressed against mine with a tenderness I had never felt.

It would be exactly as I had always imagined. With one kiss, he could make whole what had once been missing.

I was the only werewolf that could shift without losing clothes and becoming completely naked. It was a special talent no one could dismiss.

But even with my clothes on, I could feel his naked skin. His shaft, uninhibited, pressed against my thigh.

He held me in his arms, and I yearned for him to explore my body, to cup gentle fingers over my breasts.

Within moments, I was on my back, lying in the grass. My ass hurt from the fall, so I rubbed it, grimacing.

Keith roared into the sky.

His naked body was taut, with muscles flexed to full capacity. It showed how truly handsome a specimen he was.

And it made me yearn to feel his body pressed against mine once more.

But our moment was over.

He quickly pulled on his clothes and turned to me with anger on his face.

"No being has possessed such powers over me. None. It is impossible."

"Hey, you were the one hovering over me," I reminded him.

He punched at a nearby tree with all his strength. His fist left a hole clear through.

He turned again to me. "I thought you were hurt. But now I see, it was only weakness."

He sure did know how to hurt me. The good thing was, I knew how to hurt, too.

"Next time you hold me like that, tell me who is weak," I said with a smile.

Keith's eyes grew wide with frustration. Before he could retaliate, Xavier saved me once again.

"Keith, we have found the scent of the Wiccan coven, but we will need your nose to find the entrance," Xavier exclaimed with a tired voice.

"Prepare yourself. Once we have gained entrance, there will be many challenges in our path," Keith said while looking at me.

"I'm ready for anything." This was a lie, but I said it with full conviction.

He didn't know my strength, but I would show him how powerful I could become.

"Good. Then prove it," he retorted.

Keith followed his men toward a wide ravine. Suddenly, I could feel the hair on the back of my neck stand on end.

I shook my head and cleared my belligerent thoughts. I had not sensed this type of anger before.

But it wasn't only anger. It was something much more powerful.

And it burned most when I saw *him*.

I had to admit, I kind of liked it. This type of power was something I could get used to.

But as I walked in the direction of the ravine, a sense of dread filled me up, slowly replacing the power I had just begun to feel.

Keith stood in the middle of an open meadow. His men were alert, ready for anything.

Keith looked at me once more with a cold stare. "We've arrived. Prepare yourself. The challenges that lay ahead may be deadly."