

Mated to the Werewolf King

The Challenges

The Werewolf King stood in the middle of the clearing, one hand raised in the air.

This couldn't be it. *We ran all this way for a clearing in the middle of the woods?*

A gentle wind came down the ravine and into the clearing. It sent the leaves on the trees shaking and my hair spinning.

What I saw next was mesmerizing.

Out of thin air, a portal began to form...black as night, swirling with an unknown intensity that scared me. Within seconds, the spinning portal had transformed into a door!

"What is that?" I asked. Fear was evident in my voice as well as a curiosity I could no longer hold down.

Keith turned to me with a stern look. His eyes showed he meant business. His business now included me.

This day just keeps getting better.

"This is the entrance to the Wiccan Coven. Ready yourself. Now, the tests truly begin," he said with smug satisfaction in his voice.

I didn't know anything about tests. If you asked me, this entire journey had been one hard test I wanted nothing to do with. Part of me wanted to turn around and just take o . If he caught me, it wouldn't matter. At least I wouldn't be where that portal led.

But what if he's right? Maybe this will give us answers to our deepest questions.

Could I come to know who my biological parents were? I didn't want to ever replace the only true family I knew, but the possibility was alluring to me.

Before I could even comprehend the magnitude of our situation, Keith's men opened the door and began to jump through, one by one.

A hand grasped my arm and pulled. Just like that, the world darkened around me. And what was that sensation? Were we ying?

DARKNESS.

SILENCE.

It was deafening. I felt as though I could hear everything and nothing at once.

I was oating. Or falling.

We all were. I couldn't say that for certain. But we all jumped through the same door to this dark world.

My senses couldn't make up from down. It reminded me of something—a time long ago, when I was so unsure of what I was.

That uncertainty had now come home to rest in the pit of my stomach.

I fought for air, but there didn't seem to be enough.

Keith.

Xavier.

I couldn't even feel the words forming in my mouth. It wouldn't do any good to keep trying.

Was this one of the challenges I had been warned about? If so, it felt much more psychological than physical...

I searched my memory for anything that could help.

Sean's smile and laughter ooded my mind, sending me back a few years in time to when there was a much different challenge to overcome...

On that particular day, after years of struggle, my natural instincts had decided to kick in. With the help of Sean's guidance, I was able to shift into my true wolf form.

It was miraculous.

Moon Goddess be praised, it was all thanks to my brother.

I thought back to how he congratulated me. Of course, he couldn't do it in person, but his messages had been just as important to me.

SEAN

I knew you could do it!

BELLE

Don't lie. It doesn't suit you 😏

SEAN

Seriously! It took you long enough, but we all had faith.

BELLE

Luckily, I had a good teacher... Thanks for believing in me.

SEAN

Not just me. Everyone else does, too. We're a family. We take care of our own.

BELLE

Even when I piss you o ?

SEAN

Even if you're the runt of the pack.

BELLE

🙄

SEAN

Remember what I said. Believe in your powers...no matter the struggle, you can do anything!

Believe in your powers.

And don't ever give up.

I focused on the empty void around me and took in a slow breath.

I began to move my arms and legs, swimming through the tides of still air that kept me a oat.

Gradually, I could see the darkness lightening. My body felt heavier, but it was a welcome feeling. Who would have ever thought that?

My arms were still tired from running, but I pushed through the pain. Just a few more strokes...

The cave lled with a deafening roar as we all landed on the ground. I opened my eyes onto a dim light. The shadows moved.

"Xavier! Belle!" Keith's deafening voice reverberated in the cavern.

He sounded different than before. Almost afraid.

I smiled. This subtle change in the monster was new. Maybe he wasn't so strong after all.

This was going to be interesting...

My eyesight adjusted, allowing me to see the King and his men lying on the ground. I moved closer.

Their eyes were closed but moving.

Like puppies dreaming. Giant, strong puppies at that.

Even Xavier looked to be in the midst of a nightmare, unable to wake.

"By the powers of the Moon Goddess, what is happening?" I whispered.

Keith and his men jumped to their feet, tearing at the world around them. Their eyes were open, but their pupils remained hidden behind clouds of white.

They were still dreaming!

"I see the creatures!" one of the soldiers yelled. "They're crawling on the walls!"

"Ready yourself for attack!" Keith yelled.

I looked around the cavern but saw no one else. We were alone.

His men had begun to attack each other. They swung wildly, sts connecting with esh and bone.

I watched in horror as the ones who were sent to protect me on this journey instead fought around me.

I avoided swinging sts and wayward kicks, nding a satchel on the ground. Inside was a lantern. I checked to see if it was broken.

The glass was intact as well as the mantle. It should still give o light!

I turned it on. The fuel inside had shifted. The light was weak at rst. I turned the dial and slowly, willfully, the light grew.

"I can't stop them. There are too many!" Keith's voice growled.

I touched his arm, and he inched.

"Keith!" I screamed.

He let out an enormous roar that tore through the cavern and pierced my ears. It was so powerful even his men stopped ghting each other.

His body changed. His eyes opened, and I could see his pupils.

His large hands brushed gently against my face.

"Belle?" he asked.

"Look around. There are no enemies here. We are alone," I assured him.

We were in a dark cavern surrounded by nothing but jagged stones.

"Not enemies of the esh. But these attacked our minds," he growled.

I noticed Xavier was back to normal. He helped the other men, who still struggled to get their own bearings, stumbling as they moved around in their groggy state.

Then I saw something.

"Over there! Look!" I exclaimed.

I pointed to three tunnels on the far side of the cavern. They sat in a row, beckoning for someone to explore.

"How did you see those? All I could see was darkness before you pointed them out," he said, with confusion in his voice.

I smiled. This was de nitely interesting.

"Not everything can be defeated with strength and brute force." I touched his arm and felt electricity pass between us. "You should remember that."

There was softness in his eyes. He licked his lips, and I wanted nothing more than to meet that tongue with my own.

"Only a witch could say such a thing," he said, and walked away.

I stood watching, pissed o he could say something so ippant.

His men were looking at the tunnels, sni ng, trying to nd the right scent.

"Careful. One wrong step and you could end up back in that free fall. And you may not have a witch to help you out of it," Keith warned.

He no doubt enjoyed the hurt he was giving me. I thought of jumping through one of the tunnels, just to force him down after me.

That was when I saw light icker. It was only for a moment. So quick, eeling, like a rabbit scurrying from brush to brush.

It came from the tunnel on the left!

"Which do we choose?" I heard Xavier ask.

"What do you see?" Keith asked me.

"Are you certain you want to take a witch's advice?" I asked.

He snarled, stretching the skin along his chiseled jaw, showing his beautiful teeth. They were still in the form of fangs, only a bit shorter.

Keith's response was to order one of his men to enter the tunnel on the right.

The soldier stepped forward.

I gasped.

"The left! It's the one on the left," I warned.

Keith looked to me once more. The snarl had changed to a full smile.

He turned and nodded to the soldier. He went to the left tunnel, wary of what he might nd.

His body disappeared into the darkness.

Tension rose in the moments he was away. Then, something happened.

He came back into the cavern.

"This way!" he exclaimed.

Soon, everyone was through the tunnel except me and Keith. He held out an arm, barring my entry.

"Thank you," he said kindly.

His direct politeness took my breath away. Not that there was much air in this cave to begin with...

I looked into his eyes, uncertain of what to say.

"You saved my men. And in turn, you saved me from potentially making a terrible mistake," he admitted.

"Think what would happen if you listened to me all the time," I said coyly.

His body language was different. More open, accepting.

I found myself stepping toward him. His magnetic pull was nearly unstoppable, no matter how hard I tried.

His eyes locked onto mine as our lips moved toward each other. Once more, I felt that falling sensation. It was unexpected, but somehow, I welcomed it.

Then, he pulled back and moved away.

"What the hell?" I said, the frustration obvious in my voice.

"I don't know what you do to me," he growled.

"Why does it matter?" The question was as much for me as it was for him.

"Because it can't be. It shouldn't be. But I don't know what else this could mean. I've never felt this before. Not with any other woman."

Did he mean it? I had the urge to leap into his arms.

"What I mean, Belle, is I think you might be my—"

His voice was cut o as a ash of light overtook the cave.

A female's voice lled our ears, sending shivers down my back.

"Well, if it isn't the Werewolf King."

I turned to look at the owner of the voice. She was beautiful. Slender and fragile, with white hair that almost seemed to emanate its own light.

"Tessa. I'm glad to see you. We need your help."

He said her name, and the warmth I felt in my stomach turned to molten lava.

Now, he needs her help?!

My body turned rigid. I lost the feeling of my feet on the oor.

Keith's eyes were wide with wonder. I thought I could even see a speck of fear. Tessa looked on with a smile.

This pissed me o even more.

I levitated higher o the ground, oating like a balloon ready to ascend to the clouds. A pulsing in my limbs matched the drumming of my heart.

I could see my veins turning blue. They writhed like snakes beneath my skin. Then, I began to glow with an otherworldly light.

"She looks like she's going to explode!" Keith gasped. His fear fed my strength.

The burning re on the inside of my body began to pass through my skin.

A ash occurred, shocking the entire cave in my blaze.

In that moment, like the ash of a bomb, everything went white.