

# The Beast And The Blessed

Chapter 191

Fifteen: Damien

Damien's P.O.V.

She was angry. Charlotte was glorious when she was angry.

Charlie. I kept having to remind myself that she was Charlie, not Charlotte. I didn't know who Charlotte was. The woman that was able to cause a stir in town just by being recognized was a mystery to me. I thought I had known a decent bit about her, but now I had no idea who she was again.

It all made sense why she avoided discussing her life before coming here to be a mercenary. Whatever her secret was, it had to be huge.

Realistically, I knew it was probably something simple like a noblewoman going rogue and wanting to live in the wild, but she would have to return eventually. It was an uncomplicated explanation, an easy one. Probably the right one.

Yet, my mind kept going to the worst-case scenario that just maybe she was on the run from something or someone. I wasn't sure why my mind kept returning to the idea of a man at home waiting for her, searching for her.

I was jealous. I was absolutely jealous of a man I had created in my head, and I had just stormed out of my house first thing in the morning to wake Charlie so we could finish our argument. I was ready to demand that we return to normal when I found Barley sitting on my front porch.

For such a big man, his ability to move and exist in complete silence made him deadly. I had either been so distracted by Charlie that I hadn't heard, smelled, or sensed him, or he had mastered the art of masking himself from living in the wild for so long.

It had taken me years to perfect it, but I only used it when I needed to.

"The girl she was and the woman she is today are too different people. Learn who she is now, don't let who she was forced to be in the past impact what you are and can have in the future." Barley got to his feet, slipping his hands in his pockets before walking past me and down the stairs. "I think you should come with us today. We're taking on a rock troll. You might have some fun and get to see a new side of Charlie. She is a fighter." i

He glanced at my garden as he walked past it, a slight smile on his face. "I see she hasn't killed any plants yet, but best to keep a watchful eye on her while she's in there. She told me stories about the plants she tried to keep alive as a kid. Said they killed themselves from how toxic the environment was, but I'm not so sure she didn't have a hand in it."

I had stood there for only a few seconds before giving up and following after him. It wasn't just because he was now the second man who really knew Charlie to tell me she was worth it and not to give up on her. It was also because I wanted to know her on the same level they did.... Well, on a higher level than they did.

They knew her mentally, but I wanted her brain and body. I could be very territorial over what was mine, and while I knew we weren't together yet, she sure felt like she was mine.

Now, I couldn't keep my eyes off her. The group, minus Neil, was marching through the forest at a brisk pace. Charlie was at the front, leading the pack, with fierce determination across her face. I wasn't sure if it was because she was set on ending the rock troll causing trouble for wanderers or if she was just that motivated to stay away from me.

Each time she had looked at me this morning, she seemed momentarily remorseful before her anger returned. I hated that I caused it, even though I was still angry too, but it looked good on her.

I couldn't keep my eyes off the sway of her hips as she moved through the trees. Each time I met Charlie's fiery gaze, I imagined holding her up against a tree and fucking the attitude right out of her.

"Have you ever dealt with one of these before?" Roman asked, falling back until he was in line with me at the back of the pack. I hadn't intended to get involved. I just wanted to watch. As Barley had put it, I wanted to see another side to her, another piece of the puzzle that was Charlie.

But I had the feeling that this was a test, my chance to prove myself to her team.

"No."

Roman nodded, pointing to the back of his neck. "There is a small pebble in the back of their neck; think of it like where our brain stems connect to our spines. It's about the size of your fingertip. We get it out, and we win. It will be dead within a minute."

"That's all?" My sarcasm was thick, but he just nodded and shrugged at me, like it was as easy as pulling a loose hair off a shirt.

"Just watch your head. They can throw rocks faster than you would believe and don't get close enough for it to touch you. One hit will pulverize every bone in your body, Charlie is the best climber out of us, so she will be

taking point." He jogged forward, breaking from the group and moving to the side. I slowed as I watched everyone do the same, crouching and preparing for battle with their weapons drawn.

I didn't have a weapon and felt out of place. A bear against a rock troll? It just didn't seem possible. It made sense why they, as wolves and Lycans, would be armed.

There was a large pile of boulders the size of a house in the middle of a clearing, and I grimaced as I pictured one of those being thrown at me. They were larger than I was and would crush me in a second flat. Anything that could pick one of those up had to be a nightmare to deal with.

Several bodies were around the clearing, none were whole, and most were unrecognizable. A few were only noticeable from where legs or an arm were sticking out from under a rock.

Charlie glanced back at me, worry crossing her face as if she could sense my unease, and she signaled with her hand for me to stay back. I scoffed. Tough chance of that. If she thought I was going to let her...

The ground shook, and I widened my stance, bracing myself as Charlie tore her green eyes from me. My head turned from side to side, waiting for the troll to make itself known.

My green-eyed beauty raced forward, jumping and propelling herself off the pile of rocks and higher just as the mountain of stone unfolded, rising to tower over us, taller than most of the trees. Charlie was on his back, holding on for dear life as the creature roared in outrage at being bothered.

Diego 'whooped' from the side like he was watching a sporting event, and I felt every ounce of anger and frustration with Charlie melt away, only to be replaced by fear.

The rock troll spun around, each footstep shaking the Earth. My knees bent further, and I placed one hand on the tree trunk at my side to steady me. My eyes were locked on Charlie with horror as she lost her footing and her body smacked against the rock troll's back. 1

"No." The word slipped from my lips before I could stop it, and Charlie pushed herself up just as the troll turned to me. His entire being was made of rocks, and as his hand grew, I knew I was in trouble.

His arm pulled back before he lobbed the giant boulder my way. I ran a few steps before diving to the side just as the boulder crashed into the tree trunk. The wood splintered as the giant stone went through it, only for the top of the tree to fall loudly against those around it. i

I spun to face him, his hand reforming as he prepared to throw again.

Never before had I hated witches, but all their little pet projects that had gotten out of hand, like this one, suddenly colored me with a new distaste for them.

Granted, whoever tried to create and tame this one was probably dead, but knowing most of these creatures were designed as weapons and then set loose on the world was a real thorn in my paw.

The men let out a loud sound in an uneven round that knocked the troll's equilibrium off. The creature shook his large head from side to side, and I used the moment to race around the troll, desperate to get my eyes on Charlie.

She was hanging with one hand from the troll's neck. Her fingers were between the head and body, and I knew he if looked up, causing his head to tilt back, her hand would be crushed to dust. 1

I had never felt fear to this extent before... I had never truly feared anything until now. But my blood boiled when I saw Charlie, my Charlotte, on the back of a beast and in danger.

She swung as he spun, but I moved with him, getting closer to catch her and take her away from here before he could step on her if she fell. A small yelp left her mouth as her hand started to slip, and she threw her body up, catching herself with her other hand.

Using her now dangling hand, she pushed off the troll's back, planted her feet against him, and went for the kill.

I felt like I was watching in slow motion as Charlie shoved her entire hand into the crack between the rocks, groaning out in pain before pulling her fist out. Blood began to bead on the scratches on her fingers, and I held my arms out to catch her as the creature stumbled forward.

It went down on one knee first. The roar it released as it fell sounded like a distortion of a human and a monster.

Charlie's eyes met mine over her shoulder, and she pushed off his back with both feet, flying backward into my arms. I grunted as she hit my chest, but it was right where she was supposed to be. I collapsed back into the dirt with her against my front, and as the creature hit the ground, the boulders that made up its body separated upon impact. A wall of dust and debris filled the air, and I covered Charlie as best I could.

I could hear her men cheering and moving forward, but I ignored them and grabbed her closed fist, inspecting her wounds. They were already closing up, the skin pulling together.

The men cheered louder when she opened her hand to expose the bright white stone glowing with magic.

"That was the smoothest takedown I have seen yet!" Diego said, sticking his hand out to me, and I accepted it, letting him help us up.

I expected Charlie to pull away from me to celebrate with her men, but she turned in my hold, leaning back against my chest as she spoke animatedly about what had just happened. I couldn't take my eyes off her, and my arms around her waist were locked in place, not ready to let her go.

Charlie rubbed her hand over the back of my forearm as she nodded with excitement. "You guys head back. Damien and I will be just behind you."

The white rock in her hand flew through the air as she tossed it, and Roman grabbed it easily.

I couldn't move as we watched her men leave, but as soon as they were out of sight, Charlie spun to face me. This wasn't the time for us to have the much-needed conversation. I was too focused on the fact that I could have lost her.

"I don't want to argue with you right now, Charlie," I said, and the corners of her mouth dropped down slightly at my use of her nickname.

"Good. I don't want to fight, either. I want to celebrate."