The Beast And The Blessed

Chapter 163

Fifty-Six: Joselin

Joselin's P.O.V.

My tower was my safe place, my comfort zone when I wasn't with Tobias. Yet right now, I stood in the middle of it, feeling like there were bugs crawling on my skin.

The ward surrounding it hadn't just been broken.

It had been shattered. I had seen the damage to it before entering. The shimmering surface looked like it had been attacked violently, like a glass window that had taken hail damage. Craters and spider webbing from the cracks covered the surface.

No one would have seen it if they didn't have magic in their blood, but they should have at least heard her attack. Based on the damage I could see, she had been wailing on my shield for a while. There was even a charred spot on the floor where she appeared to have resorted to throwing fireballs.

How had we been oblivious to this, and when did she do it?

She hadn't been here during the attack on Cyrus, so it must have been before dinner. That would have left her time to get to Rona's, attack her, and perform the ritual while we ate.

Meanwhile, I had been sitting at the hot springs with Natalie, distracted by the idea that I might be...

No. Don't think about that. There are more important matters to deal with, and knowing won't do anything other than distract me.

Still, the guards and servants, even Killian, should have heard it. Aisha and Margot, at the very least, should have recognized the sound of the magic slamming into my ward.

My skin prickled when I walked through it and opened the door to my tower. It felt like I was walking through a low-level electric fence. It was angry, yet so weak. I was almost expecting to find a trap in my tower, something to off me so Cora could be free of me and escape.

But my study was clear. There were no tricks or traps, just a safe door that, by the way the metal was bent, had been forced open, exposing that there were many missing valuables. The only thing that remained was the small vial of Rona's blood. It was crusted to the glass, having dried up when she died.

Cora clearly had no use for it. Either that or she left it as a clue, wanting to lure me to Rona's cottage so she could kill me too.

If the bears hadn't attacked her, I had to imagine she had plans to deal with me. The real question was whether they got to her in time to prevent her from absorbing Rona's powers. I could assume so since she hadn't completed enough of the ritual to take Cyrus's magic and seemed to be using Rona's magic as a conduit to get to Cyrus.

But I had already made too many mistakes. I wouldn't underestimate Cora, not after everything she had done and planned.

I reached in and knocked the vial over, picturing the smug look she must have had on her face when she left it there.

The empty spot where Cyrus's blood had been made my body stiffen, and my hands curled into fists. She would have gotten his blood one way or another; I just made it easy for her to do it without being seen.

The air whipped around the room, feeding off my anger as I tried to push back the blame that rested squarely on my shoulders.

I shook my head, trying not to think about it as Tobias swept through the tower, checking every corner, closet, and shadow. He would have smelt or felt it if someone was still in there, but I knew my safety was not something he took lightly.

Grabbing a pair of scissors, I quickly cut out the bottom chunk of my bloodied shirt.

Killian would have a larger map in his office, and I didn't want everyone in my tower. Not that I had anything left to protect or hide.

Cora had stolen all of the important items.

'It wasn't your fault," Tobias said as he looked into the empty safe.

I didn't respond because while I knew she would have found a way to get his blood one way or another, she still managed her most recent attack because of the blood I had been hiding. "We need to get the world map from Killian's office to search for Cora. She could be anywhere, and I don't want to waste time looking at smaller locations one at a time."

His brown eyes pierced through me for a few minutes. I held his stare, determined not to let him see how affected I was by my indirect involvement in Cyrus's attack.

When he stepped forward, placed his hand on the back of my head, and kissed my forehead, I felt myself start to crumble.

'Please don't," I whispered. 'The more you touch me, the harder this will be. I can't let myself feel anything right now. I need to stay focused and handle this."

His arm dropped, and he nodded. I was grateful because I knew I would fall if he wrapped his arms around me and hugged me. "We have a world map in the command center. I'm having a few warriors bring it into the main conference room. We can use that one instead."

I smiled at his thoughtfulness. Killian hated when people went into his office when he wasn't there. A glance to my left and out my tower window showed a group of men running with a long piece of rolled parchment across the field from the war room attached to the barracks.

It had to be at least ten feet tall, and I knew it was even wider. I nodded with determination. This could work.

'Have the room cleared. I want the tables and chairs out." I gripped his hand, squeezing it appreciatively before releasing him and striding over to my cabinets to grab supplies.

Cora could run, but she couldn't hide. Not from me.

A sharp pain shot through my stomach as I reached up, grabbing a few candles from my shelves. I sucked in a gasp of air, and it faded away, leaving me shocked and nervous.

Don't think about it, Joselin. Do your job. Now is not the time.

'What's wrong?" Tobias asked, moving to take the candles from me so I could grab more.

'Nothing. I just realized how much I need to carry." I moved past him, dropping my supplies onto my bed before grabbing my favorite dagger and adding it to the pile. It had drawn a lot of blood, and that made it powerful. For every life it took, that one piece of metal grew stronger.

Once I had everything, Tobias gathered the corners of the blanket and lifted it as if it were as light as a feather.

'Whatever you need, sweetheart. You let me know.' He walked by, the blanket of items thrown over his shoulder, and dropped a passing kiss against my lips. My lips curled up as I admired the muscles in his back while he walked away, then I shook my head and trailed after him.

He is a damn good man.

As soon as we reached the hallway to the largest conference room, we could see the table pieces against the wall. It seemed they had deconstructed it instead of trying to find another place to fit the giant slab of natural wood.

The chairs lined the pathway as well, and I lifted my chin, satisfied that they had done what I needed and did it so quickly. Perhaps the pack did respect or appreciate me after all.

Or maybe they would rather I face off with Cora and risk my life so they don't have to.

I knocked that thought from my head.

The pack may be uneasy around me, but they still respected me and wouldn't offer me up to their enemies after I had saved their lives repeatedly. I was a part of their pack, and we had to stick together.

The map had been stretched across the floor, and I carefully stepped around the edge as Tobias opened the blanket of supplies in the doorway. He handed me everything one piece at a time, waiting patiently as I moved swiftly through the room to set them up.

I tied my favorite scrying crystal to the end of a long piece of string, grabbed the blood-crusted piece of my shirt, and used my magic to hold it and the unused end of the string up to the center of the ceiling.

The weight of the dagger was comfortable in my palm.n.ove.lx.o I tossed it underhanded, sending it flying straight up into the air, stabbing the fabric into the ceiling, the hilt pinning the string without cutting it.

There was noise from the door, and I glared at the few guards watching before Tobias closed the door on them, leaving me alone to work.

Standing on the small strip of exposed carpet between the map and the wall, I began to speak. The wick of the candles I had spaced around the paper burst into flames.

As the Latin mumbling left my lips, the crystal began to move. At first, it was a simple vertical swing, but it rotated the longer I stared at it. The string and crystal circled the map.

The fluorescent lights in the room dimmed, n.ove.lx.o and the flames grew larger as the crystal stopped. My eyes widened. I had never gotten a location that fast.

I jumped over the corner of the map, n.ove.lx.o rushing to see where she was hiding. She was back in the mountains where the war had been, where her first attempt at killing Cyrus occurred. The smile on my face was uncontrollable. novelxo This would be over faster than any of us imagined possible.

Then it began to swing again. My stomach tightened. She was teleporting, moving to another location.

I guess I just assumed she would go into hiding to devise a plan. Maybe she was. Perhaps she was just trying to find a place to hide. The mountains wouldn't be a good idea because she had to know we would check there. novelxo We would check everywhere that had any connection to her or her magic.

When the crystal stopped again, this time on the other side of the map, I raced over. Only I was too late. By the time I got there, it was swinging once more.

What the hell is she up to? Does she know I am tracking her and is trying to throw me off her scent?

There had to be some reasonable explanation. novelxo Cora had been too meticulous and prepared up until this point. Even if the bears disrupted her plan, she would have had a backup plan. Or was she panicking now that the entire kingdom knew she was a threat and an enemy?

I did my best to make a note of the locations each time the crystal stopped swinging, but it seemed pointless. She was all over the place, popping from one location to another.

A knock on the door pulled my attention away, and I looked up just as Tobias stuck his head in. His eyebrows raised in surprise when he saw the crystal had picked up a location before dropping them in confusion as it swung freely once more.

He could have just spoken to me through the mate link, novelxo but I knew he also wanted to get his eyes on me to make sure I was okay for himself.

'It's Cyrus. He's awake. He's asking for you.'