

The Beast And The Blessed

Chapter 179

Three: Damien

Damien's P.O.V.

She had been wandering my woods for a week. A week of me following her like a lost cub, trying to figure out what her intentions were, before she finally snuck up on me.

I had been stalking her each day as she moved so effortlessly through the trees, watching with fascination as she examined every abnormality. Disruptions in the dirt, broken branches, and torn leaves.

Occasionally, I would leave a trail just to steer her in a different direction and get her away from my cabin.

She had been getting closer to finding it each day. She had never given up or taken a break beyond stopping to relieve herself or munch on food. I gave her privacy but never let her wander too far away. The last thing I wanted was for her to actually find me or where I lived.

The second the sun was up, she was sneaking through the woods.

When it set, she would go back to the river to stare at the spot I had been in when I first spotted her.

Eventually, she would turn in for the night, and there was always an uncomfortable feeling that would settle in my gut, knowing she was going back to sleep in a camp of men.

It was unreasonable and unwarranted, but I wanted to cross the river and drag her back to my side of the water like a caveman, but I shook that thought away quickly.

It had been a while since a female had crossed my land, and I had given her my attention. Even then, it had only ever been for one night. Once it was over, they went on their way.

I didn't see it necessary to seek them out, and it had been a while. Still, seeing her, even covered in some disgusting slime, sparked an interest in me that I couldn't shake.

It took everything in me to walk away that first day and not cross the river to enjoy what she was offering as she held her arms out and invited me to join her. Her emerald green eyes pierced my soul so deeply that I initially thought she was a witch.

Someone as hypnotizing as she had to be casting an enchantment. But no. She was just that breathtaking.

I hadn't been expecting an uneventful day today. I had assumed it would be the same as every day before of her wandering the woods, searching for me. But she was one step ahead and switched the roles in our game of cat and mouse.

When she stepped into view, I had been in my fur, hunched over my lunch. Her bright green eyes were wide, so innocent and happy. It was the kind of happiness that belonged there, that should be there forever.

We held gazes as I ripped another chunk of meat from the deer and chewed it slowly. If anything, her happiness turned to amusement as I growled at her.

It was pointless and sounded pathetic. My hackles weren't even up, and I felt no aggression toward her. It was simply a warning, one I hoped she took to heart because I wasn't sure I could fight her if she attacked me. There was a protective need in me, telling me to keep her safe. Fighting her would go against that, and just the idea of it made me feel sick.

Instead, the green-eyed hunter simply sat down at the base of a tree and watched me. It was invigorating, but the long sword strapped to her back reminded me not to underestimate her. Any woman willing to run after a bear in their underwear and then hunt them for a week had a motive.

I knew it wasn't a normal reaction, but I liked having her eyes on me. I liked being the center of her attention.

Maybe I did need to get laid. The next bear that came through my woods would do the trick if she were interested. But the Lycan hunting me could also do the trick, satisfy the itch. It was so tempting.

She waited patiently, her fingers slowly moving as she rubbed the tip of her thumbnail over the pad of her middle finger, the only indication that she was nervous or bored.

She held herself with such confidence and elegance that I knew she didn't belong sleeping in the woods.

Her plump pink lips parted several times as if she wanted to speak, but each time I narrowed my eyes, went back to my meal, and she would press them together with a small smile.

She was a determined little thing. I would give her that. But so was I.

I couldn't let myself get distracted by her, and knowing she was not here alone, having seen several men in the area recently, I needed to be cautious. Wolves and Lycans had never gotten along with bears, and I suspected this was a trap.

Send the beautiful woman to catch my attention, so her hunting party can ambush me.

My lip curled at the thought, and I stood over my kill with a roar that everyone would surely hear within a mile. That had to be it. I had never had a woman as beautiful and poised as her wander into my woods. Never before had they ever had any interest in me either. Yet, she wouldn't leave me alone.

The huntress's eyes widened at my change, and I watched as she dropped her hands to the ground as if to push herself up. The action was confusing and made me growl. She was foolish. She should have grabbed her weapon. Even the small one on her thigh would have worked.

I could attack her before she could get to her feet, but she might have been able to pull her sword or a dagger in time. Why wasn't she preparing to defend herself?

I stepped back, panic finally showing on her face.

"No, wait!" She called out as I continued to move away from her. Her voice was like warm honey, so soothing and sweet. I could sit back and listen to her talk for hours. But that was probably their plan.

With her bright doe eyes, the addictive sound of her voice, and the pull I felt to her... she had to be using magic. Maybe she was tampering with siren blood, or perhaps she had a witch in her hunting party who had managed to escape my notice.

Either way, I didn't want to wait and find out. It was bad enough that I had allowed her so close while eating. Wolves couldn't be trusted.

I had let my guard down, which wasn't a mistake I was willing to make again.

As she scampered to her feet, I spun around, running through the trees as quickly as I could and as far away from my cabin as possible.

Either she didn't follow, or she was stealthier than I had thought because not once did I hear her soft footsteps behind me.

I was on edge the rest of the day, waiting for her to appear as she had before. There was a sadistic part of me that wanted her to, regardless of her intentions.

If she wanted to skin me alive, the risk might be worth seeing her smile at me again like she did earlier.

I stopped, my feet planted in the dirt in front of my cabin. I spent all of twenty minutes with that woman, and I was already contemplating allowing her to pull her blade on me just to see her look at me with her lips curved up.

It was ridiculous.

Yet, as I reached for the door handle to enter my home, my legs stopped moving. The sun had just started to set, and I knew she would be sitting by the river, staring at where I had been standing when she first saw me.

I'll admit that I knew she was there when I walked up to clean my hands. She wasn't exactly silent and put on one hell of a show.

I could have walked away, but something wouldn't let me.

Even back then, I wanted her to see me.

I wanted to get a closer look at her too.

Just one look at her.

Before I knew it, I was stomping back through the forest, furious with myself for needing to see that she made it back to her camp okay. She had never had any problems doing so over the past week, but something was different about tonight.

I was so blinded by my anger and frustration that I almost ignored the sounds of metal clanging coming from the river and barged right to my spot, the same spot I had been watching her from at night when she went to the river.

A man's shout of pain made me slow, and I ducked behind a tree.

"You should know better," The huntress laughed. My eyes closed briefly before I shook my head and opened them back up to the rapidly darkening forest.

"You shouldn't be so cocky." The man said coldly, and as the sound of metal sliding into the leather sheath reached me, I peered around the trunk.

"Come on, Roman." She said, nudging the bottom of his boot with her the toe of hers. "You never said I had to fight fair."

A smile pulled at the corner of his lips as he looked away from her. For a moment, I wondered if he had seen me, but his eyes glanced right over where I was hiding.

The proud look on his face as he nodded and lifted himself from the dirt, made my chest puff with pride. Whatever she had done had landed a grown man on his ass and proved that she was every bit the threat I assumed her to be.

"Was that it? You said we were training." She turned her back to me, lifting her arms in exasperation before putting her weapon away.

"It was sparring. I have trained you already. Now we just practice. You did well." He didn't bother looking over his shoulder as he lifted his hand and waved at her dismissively. "You two, have fun."

I watched as her back tensed, and she held still until he had moved out of sight.

Clearly, she hadn't realized I was here, or she didn't know the man would have been aware of me. I wasn't upwind, and I had been quiet.

For several minutes she adjusted her sheath, pulled her wild hair up into a bun, and washed her hands in the river.

She didn't look up when I stepped into view and leaned against the tree trunk.

There was no reason for me to be here still. I had seen that she was safe for myself, but I stayed instead of turning around and going to my home.

"My name is Charlotte." She called out, her right hand moving again as she subtly rubbed her thumbnail against another fingertip. Even with her head down, I could see when she bit down on her plump lower lip nervously. The sight drove me crazy, and my eyes narrowed as I waited for her next move. "Charlie."

Was she trying to seduce me, or was this just her natural mannerisms?

Charlotte. It was a beautiful name and matched the woman it belonged to.

I opened my mouth to respond, but I couldn't decide how I wanted to respond. Should I give her my name, tell her it was nice to meet her, or demand answers for why she was following me?

When she looked up at me, my mouth snapped shut. Those green eyes made the air catch in my throat.

"Why do you keep running away from me?"

My head jerked back with my eyebrows raised as I failed to hide my amusement. I wasn't expecting her to speak at all, let alone for her to be so direct.

"You intentionally leave me these little trails and tracks to follow, but they never lead anywhere. Then when I do get close to you, you run. Why are you doing this?" She was an intelligent woman to have seen through the fake trails I left her. Still, she sounded so confused, and it caused a sinking feeling to form in my chest.

I didn't like that some woman I barely knew was making me feel this way. I didn't know her or owe her anything. She wasn't even one of my kind.

Hope filled her eyes when I opened my mouth, but I didn't know what to say.

'(...Goodnight, Charlotte.