

# The Beast And The Blessed

Chapter 190

Fourteen: Charlie

Charlie's P.O.V.

Damien had walked with us back to camp, and I could practically taste the dread bubbling up and poisoning my good mood. I could feel how bothered he was, but I wasn't ready to bring him into that part of my world. He was learning who I was as a person. My crown wasn't tainting his perception of me just yet. I preferred that.

I was more than my title, and I knew if that were thrown into the mix, he would be bothered by it.

I had to take baby steps with him, and as excited and eager as I was to finally have my mate, I was ready for him to want me as much as I wanted him. My impatience was going to drive me insane.

Damien sat on the log beside me as Neil and Diego argued over their dice game. Roman sat quietly, staring into the fire, as usual, lost in thought.

Barley and Paxton loudly joked with each other, sipping the liquor they had purchased from town. We hadn't been able to do our entire supply run because of me, so we would have to return in a few days.

I was hoping things would have settled down by then. The last thing I wanted was for Damien to see how wild people could get when they realized the princess was among them. Most of the time, they were happy and excited to see me. But occasionally, when they realized I didn't have guards, they would take out their anger and annoyance for what was going on in the world on me.

When it got out of hand like that, and I was outnumbered, threatened, and occasionally getting attacked, it was almost as scary as facing my brother in his Lycan form on the battlefield. People could be cruel, but I had to accept that early on in life. As an adult, I had to be careful to dodge that minefield.

I pressed my leg against Damien's, feeling my heart drop when he pulled away. Having him sitting here, staying with us instead of returning to his home, was confusing. Whatever battle he was fighting in his head seemed to consume his energy because he wouldn't even look at me.

"Do you want to go for a walk?" I whispered, my cheeks heating up when Diego, Neil, and Paxton started hooting and hollering. They were the worst.

I loved them. "To talk."

My clarification received a few chuckles as they returned to their game and conversations. I felt Damien tense at my question, and I worried I had done something wrong. Why was he here if he didn't want to be around me?

"No, I think I'm going to head home." He stood, and I almost expected him to turn to me to help me up or to ask me to walk back to the river with him for a proper goodbye, but he started walking without another word.

"Wait!" I called out as I jumped from my seat and chased after him. "Did I do something wrong?" "No.-

I laughed coldly, grabbing his arm and encouraging him to face me. "Then why are you treating me like this? You haven't said a word to me in hours; you've pulled away each time I try to touch you, and now you're leaving without a goodbye, a kiss, or maybe, I don't know, even looking at me."

Damien spun to face me, his black eyes burning into my soul as I saw that he had built his walls back up. "Who are you?"

My jaw dropped open. I knew Damien wasn't stupid and that having to run from town when someone recognized me would raise some questions, but I wanted to keep that part of myself tucked away for now. "I... I'm me." "And who is that? Are you Charlotte, or are you Charlie? What's the difference because I'm starting to feel like they may be two different people?" Damien's hand grabbed my hip as I stepped closer, but it almost seemed instinctive. He dropped it as soon as he realized he had done it.

"I come from a prominent family. A lot of people know of me, but they're all strangers. They only know of my full name, or they've seen my picture." I stepped in front of him to stop him from leaving when he moved toward the fallen tree on the river bank.

I looked between his eyes, silently begging him not to push me for more information... information I wasn't ready to share. It was a double-edged sword. Telling him would push him away, and keeping it a secret would push him away. It was just a matter of deciding which one I could return from.

I wanted him to fall in love with me for who I am, not hate me for being Princess Charlotte.

Ironically, my biggest fear when I was being courted by men in the past was that they always wanted what they would get from being associated with me because of my status. Not a single one of them cared to learn more about me.

With Damien, I knew without a doubt that being Princess Charlotte would have the opposite effect and push him away from me.

"You're still keeping something from me," There was a pause where I could almost hear him debating between calling me Charlotte as he had been and calling me Charlie as my friends and family do. He was obviously bothered that people who I didn't know or trust called me Charlotte when that was what he called me.

"Damien, I'm not ready to talk about it yet." I pleaded, begging him to understand.

"Yeah, I got that. Goodnight."

I gaped at him as he turned and walked away, crossing the makeshift bridge before I could collect myself to stop him. "We all have secrets, Damien. One day, you will know all of mine, and I hope to know all of yours."

I waited a moment longer, staring at his back as he walked away before making my way back to the camp. The cold mask I reserved for the court fell into place as if I had never left the castle as I returned to the very tense and silent camp that had just heard us arguing.

Barley gestured me over to sit next to him, and I knew if I let him comfort me, I would crumble. A hug from him had the power to open the floodgates, and I wasn't ready for that. It shouldn't be this hard to be with your soulmate.

Most wolves found their one, fell in love, and mated for life. It was the stuff from storybooks and fairytales.

I had dreamed of that since I was a kid.

My parents had an awful relationship. My father had chosen my mother as a breeder after failing to find his fated mate, and their forced mating destroyed them.

I didn't want that. I wanted what everyone else had. The instant connection, the happiness, and the promise of forever and family.

Yet, I had been bound to a man who didn't believe we were mates because he couldn't feel it and was also on the fence about giving me a chance because I wasn't one of his kind.

I wouldn't give up on us. After everything I had been through in my life, I deserved to find happiness, and he was it. There wasn't a doubt in my mind that Damien was the only one I would ever want, and I was going to fight for him.

I would be mad first, angry that he had walked away from me just because I wasn't ready to spill my guts to a man that was already looking for reasons not to be with me.

I would allow myself one night of anger, and in the morning, I would start fresh. My etiquette tutor taught me that trick when I was a little girl. She realized I had difficulty hiding my emotions, an essential skill for any royal family member. She was the only person to tell me it was okay to let those negative emotions surface as long as I didn't let them impact my reputation.

It just so happened that while it wasn't healthy to go to bed angry, nighttime was the only time I ever had to be truly alone. There was no schedule for me to attend meetings or visit different places in the city for publicity. There was no training I had to be at or fake people I had to give fake smiles to in the court. No guards were in my room waiting to report their gossip like they were in the hallway.

I crawled into my bedroll and pulled Damien's blanket to my chin. His smell made me want to cry with frustration because it made me feel better to be surrounded by it even though I was angry, but I couldn't because everyone would hear me. So instead, I closed my eyes and breathed deeply until I had forced myself to sleep.

The sound of the men getting ready in the morning made me stir, and I dressed quickly. We knew the rules. Once a bounty was out, we needed to be the first ones there. We wouldn't be the only ones to receive the notice, and we wanted to be the ones to get paid for it.

I strapped on my weapons and pulled my hair into a high bun to keep it out of the way. Damien's smell continued to reach me, and the reminder that we had fought last night dampened my usual excitement for a hunt.

As I climbed out of my tent, my heart stopped when I looked up and saw Damien sitting across the fire, watching me. His black eyes looked emotionless, and I didn't know what to do or say. "Morning, girl," Barley said, clasping his hand on my shoulder as he shoved a cup of coffee into my hands. "Hope you don't mind, but I invited Damien to see us work today."

I tore my gaze away from my mate, wanting to scold Barley for interfering, but I knew he had no ill intent.

Still, excitement filled me, knowing that Barley had gone to Damien's cabin to talk to him, and not only had Damien come back with him, but he didn't look as angry as I had expected. If anything, I imagined Damien would have been even more bothered by Barley going onto his land.

"Morning," I whispered back before sipping my coffee. Never in my life had I felt so out of place, not knowing if I should greet Damien or how to do so after last night. It hadn't been a big fight, but knowing I was the one in the wrong made me uneasy.

The problem was that the only way to make it right was to tell him the truth and risk losing him.

Damien watched me closely as I made my way around the fire, wanting to sit next to him even though we were both still angry. "Coffee?" I offered to hold out my steaming mug, but he shook his head.

"Already had some." "Right." My fingers tapped against my mug, and I pressed my lips together. Well, this was going to be awkward.