

The Beast And The Blessed

Chapter 128

Twenty-Two: Joselin

Joselin's P.O.V.

Of all the inconceivable requests Aurora could have made, this one was the most irksome. I had more important things to do than trampling through the forest, looking for some creature she wanted to collect, like prized cattle.

'Find him. Convince him to come here.'

Her vague instructions then included no more than to tell me I had to do this without using magic and I had to go alone.

I had yet to determine if I would be capturing a human, a troll, or a dragon. All I knew was that she was wasting my time, trying to get me to prove myself to her before she would accept the offer to be my pledge.

It was infuriating... and fun. I loved a good challenge, and whatever game Aurora was playing, I wanted to win. It was almost a sickness, the need to excel at everything and prove myself as the best.

What frustrated me the most was the time it would take. The thought that this was a trap to get me away from the castle while the threat closed in on my people, my family, was brief.

Aurora was a descendant of the Moon Goddess, and I had faith in Her. I had to trust that she wouldn't and hadn't turned her back on the Goddess or her daughter. So, I had to weigh my options. Do I risk another getting a permanent spot on the council by staying to protect my people, or do I inform the others of the threat and have them look out for it while I am gone?

It wouldn't be such a hard decision if I knew how long I would be gone. I would go, in a heartbeat, to keep the council trustworthy if it was only a few days. But I had no idea what was in store for me or how long I would be away.

I was sulking and lost in thought as I stormed toward the dining hall. If I was going to make a rational decision, I needed food.

Aurora was already sitting at the head table with Henry and Holden. Holden looked amused and slightly disgusted, sitting next to the mushy couple as Henry kissed Aurora's knuckles before whispering something in her ear that made her cheeks turn the darkest shade of red I had ever seen.

My usual seat to Natalie's left was still open, but her chair remained empty. She had probably taken lunch in Killian's study as they preferred. Holden sat to my left, and he smiled brightly when he saw me approaching.

I felt eyes burning into the side of my head. The way my body lit up to alert me of his presence told me exactly who it was. His brown eyes bore into mine from where he sat at the long stretch of the table, and butterflies filled my stomach when I saw him glance from me to Holden.

He was still jealous, that foolish man. He should know by now that I was his and had been for years.

I glanced back to Holden, trying not to flinch when I saw how his mouth turned down, and he nodded in acceptance.

I would have to make time for him as a friend, but this choice was more important to my future than anything.

My feet carried me forward, and I watched as the corner of Tobias's mouth twitched as he tried to hide his smile.

The table fell quiet as I took the seat next to Tobias.

His hand landed on my thigh, and he squeezed it once, but I could practically hear him silently praising me for making the right decision. Maybe this would result in another reward.

The servant looked equally confused as they brought out my prepared plate and found me sitting among the pack. It was customary for our plates to be put together by the chef and served to us while the rest of the pack ate buffet style. It was so we could reduce the risk of contaminated or poisoned food.

Tobias had no problem making his plate, and I wrinkled my nose at the large amount of green beans he had next to his overflowing sandwich.

I turned to face him, wanting to tell him everything about this morning but unable to with all the ears focused on us. They were listening in, trying to find something to gossip about as if my choice of seat hadn't already been enough for them.

Instead, I felt nervous for the first time in a long while and could only form a "Good Morning."

Tobias flashed his straight, white teeth at me before leaning in and kissing me quickly in response. His hand that was not on my thigh picked up his sandwich, and he began to eat, rubbing his other thumb along the outside of my thigh.

The warmth of his palm burned against the skin, and I pressed my leg closer to him, enjoying the feeling as our legs pressed together.

I had never pegged him for the type to enjoy public displays of affection, but I did peg him for the guy who would publically lay his claim on his woman. As I peeked up and saw Holden in a conversation with Aurora, not looking in our direction, I felt my chest tighten when I realized Tobias did it because he was happy to see me and not for a claim.

The things this man could do to me and made me feel were almost magical.

"Are you free after lunch? I want to talk to you about something." My whisper was still heard throughout the room as several people started making suggestive comments or whistling. I would have blushed if it wasn't followed by someone saying, "Looks like the White Witch is ready for seconds."

Tobias let out a loud growl as I stood up, aiming my hand toward the man laughing with his friends.

"You have taken for granted the ability to speak freely. You have forgotten your place." A smirk crossed my lips as he began to scream, his lips sealed shut as I cast a short lasting curse over him. He would be free to speak, eat, and drink again tomorrow. But until then, I would enjoy the silence. "I have fought and killed for you a hundred times over. Show respect, or don't show your face in my home."

They didn't have to eat here. They chose to. The dining hall was open to everyone, but no one was forced to attend, even during the official pack dinners.

They could eat at any one of the inns or restaurants, or they could eat in their own homes. The pack mentality made them want to come here and eat together. Isolating themselves only lasted so long before they craved the company of other their kind.

Several pack members gasped as the man began clawing at his face, trying to open his mouth before racing out of the dining hall. I presumed he would go to the healers, but even they couldn't help him.

The room was silent but relaxed as I sat back down, and Tobias watched me with amusement.

I waited for another comment or the pouting Lycan to storm back in as we ate. It would have been amusing to watch him mime for me to fix him, and I was very disappointed that he didn't.

By the time we had finished our meals, Tobias had looked agitated. He gathered our empty plates and led me away. I had expected to go back to my tower with him, but I was shocked when he took me out of the castle and to the familiar house on the outskirts of the town.

It looked run down and forgotten, unlike the place I once knew as a child. Tobias would occasionally bring me here, only when his father wasn't home. When he was, we would stay in the forest and play.

I was curious why he had brought me here, but as his hand tightened in mine, I knew better than to ask.

The porch creaked beneath us loudly in protest. As Tobias opened the door, the site of the gutted house made my eyes widen. The floor had been ripped up, and there was a pile of drywall by the base of the stairs.

"I need to tell you something too." His deep voice sounded thicker, and I saw him staring at the chunks of the drywall on the floor.

"Okay, you first.' My hand ran over his back as I whispered the word. It was clear that what he had to tell me would be more painful than my news of leaving for a few days.

"You know about my father already," He stated, facing me with his hands on my hips.

I nodded. I did know about his father's death when Tobias was young. It was tragic. I would see Tobias going in and out of the bunkhouse for years, having no one who could take him in. 'I am sorry for your loss.'

Tobias let his head fall back as a cruel laugh left his hips. ' Don't be. I'm the one who killed him.'

It wasn't easy to school my expression and keep my surprise from showing. Something like that would have gotten around the pack, and I was surprised I hadn't known about this before now. They must have kept that pretty tight- lipped. 'I'm sure you have your reasons. You don't have to tell me if you don't want to. You are entitled to your secrets.'

Tobias shook his head, the forced smile falling from his lips. The pain etched into his face was unlike any emotion I had ever seen from him before.

"He used to beat me, Josie. Every night for as long as I could remember, he would beat me and then lock me in my closet until he felt I had learned my lesson." His eyes flickered over to the cut-out drywall sheets, and I knew he had cut them out of the wall for a reason.

It made sense now, the days that would go by without me seeing him. I always thought he was mad at me, and then he would appear again, acting as if everything was normal. It wasn't until we were fourteen that he cut me out of his life. We didn't speak for a few years.

The thought that his father had been beating him made me furious. If I had known then, I would have killed the man for Tobias.

"I am glad that you were able to free yourself," I said, letting my hands land on his chest, but he leaned back slightly as he closed his eyes.

We stood like that for several moments before he opened his eyes again. "I was, but I was too late. I wasn't strong enough back then. I had just shifted for the first time. It wasn't until after he got to her that I snapped."

Her.

My breathing caught in my throat as I pieced it together.

"He killed my mate, Josie. He murdered Ana right in front of me.