

The Beast And The Blessed

Chapter 162

Fifty-Five: Joselin

Joselin's P.O.V.

Charlie was the definition of beauty. Everything about her was perfect and symmetrical. Her curls looked immaculate even without products or styling tools out in the woods.

"Are you okay to be here?" Charlie asked lowly, but everyone around would still hear her question. It was the curse of not having a pack link.

But I could talk to Tobias privately, which was good enough for me. He was all I needed.

Most of the pack knew my story. Those who had been there the day I was found heard my story, and word was spread through the pack. But from the horrified looks on their faces when they saw Rona tied to the rock with her skin carved up, I don't think this is what they had expected.

At least Rona had been knocked out during it. That wasn't a luxury I had been given, and from the way he was moving and screaming, neither was Cyrus.

"I am fine," I said as calmly as possible. Because I was. I had come to terms with my past a long time ago, and after facing the alter in the mountains with Tobias, this one didn't seem so bad...even though there was a body on this one. "You saw her? Cora? Did you see her here with your own eyes?"

My head tilted down as I examined the dirt beneath us, seeing the signs of a small struggle in the loose soil. The indents from feet and paws were deep.

"Yes. I saw her. Damien almost had her too. He got a bite on Cora's arm before she got away." Her words made my eyes widen, and I glanced at the beast of a man with excitement. There was barely any on the corner of his mouth, but the tiny spot of red there was good enough for me.

He drew blood.

I bent my knees, squatting by the disturbed soil. My fingers slipped through the Earth as I closed my eyes and pulled the foreign object from the ground.

"Woah." One the guard said, and as I opened my eyes, I watched as three drops of blood began forming at the top of the dirt. With a swipe of my hand, they collected, and the large crimson blob hovered over my palm.

It wasn't until I looked up that I noticed all of Rona's blood had risen, too; the pool of liquid was far too large and sloshed angrily at the disruption. As I rose to my feet, the invisible wall holding it up broke, and Rona's blood rushed out and back over the dirt and grass before reabsorbing. There was no use for it now that she was dead.

Aurora stepped back, the blood barely missing her toes as she released her hold on Rona's arm. "No one deserves to die this way."

Her murmur made my chest tighten as I bit back my response that no one deserved to live that way either. Once you experience the horror that Rona did... that I did ...that Cyrus did, it scars you.

Nightmares still surfaced every few weeks, taking me back to that night. I would never be free of it.

I blinked once as I glanced back down at the redhead before turning my back to her. "If she can teleport, we need to get back to the castle and track her. We are wasting time."

My hand moved to wipe the blood on the edge of my shirt, something I could take with me and keep my magic focused on teleporting instead of holding the liquid.

"Are you coming with?" I asked over my shoulder at Charlie and the bear behind her as I placed my hand on Tobias's forearm.

"You're just going to leave the body like this?" Aurora asked, appalled, disgust lacing her words and on her face. She could judge all she wanted, but taking care of the body of a woman who had tried to kill me through my childhood and who had killed her own mother was not at the top of my priorities.

Aurora stepped back toward Rona in an almost defensive stance, her hand clutching the cold one of the corpse.

Yet, I remained unfazed. "There is no need to waste time on the dead when we are trying to prevent more from joining them."

Every second we waste could lead to another death. Now that Cora knew we were onto her, she would either gun for Cyrus, more determined than ever, or derail. Everyone knew once a serial killer was exposed, they tended to panic, and their actions would become more erratic, normally messier than before. She would be angry and possibly scared. She should be. I would make sure she never saw the light of day again.

"She is one of us! One of you!" Aurora argued, thrusting her finger back toward the body. "She was being controlled! We have no clue which of her actions were truly hers and which were Cora's!"

For a woman who had lived her life hiding in a cave, I had been stupid to assume that she would be used to seeing death.

"You are free to do as you wish, Aurora. But I will focus on protecting the rest of our people, the ones still living." I turned back to Charlie, who shook her head at me.

"We will head that way soon. I'll help take care of the body." She said as Damien stepped forward with a dip of his chin in respect and agreement.

A hand grabbed my arm, and I watched as several guards linked together. A handful remained, determined to protect the princess and the mother of the queen, but the rest looked anxious to get back to defend their people, their families, their king, and their queen.

"So be it. We will see you soon." I said firmly, subtly insisting that she come home to visit soon and assure her brother that she was okay.

The world faded around us slower than last time, and I had a brief moment where my confidence faltered. It was more people than I had ever taken on my own, and I felt like a kid trying to peddle my bike up a hill. But I did it.

When the white realm around us cleared and we landed in the castle's foyer, I let out a breath of relief. Tobias held under my elbow to keep me up, but I was already moving.

I needed to get to Cora's room to look for anything that could indicate where she was hiding, to check on Cyrus, and then to track Cora with the blood that had dried on the hem of my shirt.

The hallways were clear of stragglers. The only people in sight were the guards lining the walls. There were more than normal, two on every door and one blocking the entrance to each hallway.

They were on full lockdown, just as I ordered.

It felt good. Safe. I was confident in our warriors and guards to protect the crown. Since Cyrus was with them, I could focus on what I needed to do without the distraction of babysitting anyone.

"Where are Aisha and Margot?" I asked over my shoulder to anyone that would listen, and one of the guards responded immediately that they were in the dungeon from behind me.

My hand shot out, breaking the barrier Cora had in place to protect her room. Clearly, she had cast it before when she was weaker and felt no need to update it. Either that or she used minimal effort, knowing it was pointless.

The door slammed into the wall behind it, and I surveyed the area. It looked clean and empty. Like she hadn't stayed a single night here since arriving. Now that I knew she could teleport, it very well could be the case.

She could have gone or done anything while she was here.

With a flick of my wrist, the mattress lifted off the box spring, showing nothing was hidden beneath it before it fell back down. Drawers opened as I walked by, and I scowled.

Empty. All of them.

"I want every maid who has ever touched this room since Cora's arrival brought to me. I want to know everything they saw and touched!" I shouted angrily, grabbing the tray from the dresser containing a water pitcher and an empty glass and throwing it against the wall.

Even that had been untouched. The glass was dry with no fingerprints or lip marks. The pitcher was still fairly full.

Tobias was also searching the room, the only warrior I would trust right now to find evidence and not tamper with it if she was in their head.

The same guard from before spoke nervously, his voice shaking. "There are none. She declined entry and said she didn't want anyone disrupting her space."

Witches usually locked their studies, but most guests allowed their rooms to be cleaned during their stay. The fact that she hadn't....

"She was never even staying here." I spat, stopping and taking a deep breath to calm myself. "She had us all fooled."

My hands were in fists at my side, and I took a deep breath to collect myself. I didn't have time to think, but I needed to. I would first check on Cyrus to make sure he was okay, and then I would start the location spell on Cora.

No.

First, I would take a minute to think and breathe. I needed to collect myself, to calm myself before doing anything irrational.

My hand moved out, and I laced my pinky with Tobias's only a few inches away. That one small touch made everything in my mind calm.

"What are your orders?" The guard asked, sounding scared.

"I have already given my orders. No one in or out besides the group who has yet to return. Princess Charlotte and her mate may be arriving with them. Any sign of Cora and I want to be notified immediately." I snapped, releasing Tobias's hand and moving out into the hallway.

The queen's study was in the other wing, and I moved quickly. My energy levels had dropped dramatically, and I didn't trust myself to teleport so soon.

The guards in front of the door stepped aside and nodded for me to enter.

As soon as I did, Natalie was out of Killian's lap and barreling toward me. Her arms wrapped around me, and I kept mine at my sides. I had never been good with unsolicited touching, but seeing how much she cared made me feel good. It made me feel wanted and loved.

Killian was right behind her, and his eyes scanned me over as if looking for injury, stopping at the dried blood at the hem of my shirt. Cora's blood.

"I am so glad you two are okay," Natalie said, pulling back and moving to hug Tobias, who seemed even more uncomfortable.

Thomas snorted in amusement from where he stood against the wall, but as I turned to look at him, my eyes were caught by the sight of Cyrus. The healers were still with him as he lay on the couch, his eyes closed and his breathing slow.

I cleared my throat, hiding the concern and emotion building in my chest. "What's his status?"

Flora shook her head as she held her hand over his forehead. "He hasn't woken yet. I'm not sure when he will. The damage wasn't to his body directly, and we can't touch the soul. His vitals are strong, though."