

# The Beast And The Blessed

Chapter 177

## The Bear and The Beauty - One: Charlie

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#### Chapter One: Charlie

##### Charlie's P.O.V.

I could hear them laughing from here. There were a hundred yards of thick trees between us, and I could still hear them laughing at me.

The corner of my lips pulled up at the sound. Even if I was the butt of the joke, it felt amazing. Before them, I never had someone willing to treat me as an equal. Let alone to be so bold as to laugh at me to my face.

But as I grabbed a large glob of the thick green slime from my chest, I let a chuckle slip out too. It dripped through my fingers, stringing through them to the ground just as I reached the river's edge.

I deserved this. I knew better.

Yet, I still ended up covered in troll snot because I was careless. There were worse ways to end up after a battle with a rogue troll, but being drenched in their mucus was not my favorite.

Flicking my fingers to the side, the slime smacked loudly against the leaves of the overgrown bush next to me.

He would bring in a nice payday, but getting his remnants from my clothes and memory would take forever.

Oh, if my brother could see me now. He would be furious. Risking my life to chase monsters and sleeping in the forest with five men. Of course, they were in separate bed rolls and tents, but just thinking about him seeing how I lived now... I could picture the vein in Killian's forehead threatening to burst.

He hated having his heir so far away and out from under his thumb. It was part of the reason why I left. Whenever he vocalized his dislike for my occupation, he always said it wasn't suitable for 'the heir' to be putting herself in danger. Not once had he said he was worried about 'his sister.'

There was a big difference. One I resented.

As soon as I had the opportunity, I fled home like the hounds of hell were on my heels.

To be fair, they technically were. An angry Lycan was one thing, but the Lycan king? Forget about it.

A thick layer of sweat coated every inch of my body, and I excitedly eyed the water. The only good thing to come of accidentally puncturing the pocket of mucus that trolls had under their chin, like a croaking frog, was that I was given first rights to bathe.

As the only woman here, I usually let them go first.

Five filthy men waiting on one woman seemed unreasonable, even though they argued otherwise, but now it was my turn to enjoy the cool water instead of having to sit in damp clothing as the sweat dried along my skin.

Not bothering to remove my disgusting clothes, I waded into the water. The chill in the stream sent a shiver along my spine as I bent my knees and sank down. My hands fisted into the sand, and I rubbed it over my top first. It had been the easiest way for a quick clean, and when the small pebbles washed away through my fingers, I reached down and grabbed more.

Once I felt confident that the sludge had been forced from the fabric, I began the struggle of pulling the wet long-sleeve top from my body. I should have learned my lesson by now and switched to leather. The men had offered to make me some so I could sew it into a functional top, something easier to clean, but the idea of wearing that through the hot summer sounded horrendous.

I knew what those men smelled like by the end of the day. Somehow, it managed to be more pungent after a day of working around camp than when we were out stalking, chasing, and slaughtering creatures for the bounties.

How that happened, I had no idea. While I appreciated my family of misfits and monster hunters, I didn't want to smell like them.

I rang out my top before climbing back up the river bank and laying it over the rocks to dry. I knew I would still go to bed with it at least damp and would have to hang it up around camp, but it was better than it crusting with mucus. My pants were next, and as I pulled them over my thighs with a groan, my heel caught a rock and sent me down on my ass.

A sharp cry left my lips as the uneven stones beneath me bruised my tailbone, and I kicked the fabric free from around my ankles.

I didn't bother to lay them out. They deserved their punishment of sitting tangled up in a wet ball for the time being.

'Hm,' A deep hum of amusement reached my ears, and my cheeks burned brightly as I looked up. A beast of a man was bent over the bank of the river almost 20 yards downstream, rinsing what looked like blood from his hands. His thick forearms were massive, and the veins were prominent as his large hands splashed water over them.

His broad chest and shoulders made my mouth go dry, and my jaw dropped at his size. Growing up surrounded by Lycans, I was used to shirtless, muscular men walking around. But he put them to shame. I was sure if one wanted to, a full-grown Lycan could hide behind him, and no one would be the wiser.

His dark eyes were alight with amusement, with his eyebrows raised as he held my stare and continued to clean himself. I couldn't tell if they were a deep brown or black from the distance, but I wanted to find out. I felt stuck in place for a moment as the breeze shifted and his delicious scent wafted over to me. I had never smelt anything so enticing before.

It was addictive and burned into my mind. I could drown in it and would greet the Goddess with open arms and thank her for creating such a perfect man and smell before ever even meeting him.

Him. My mate.

I could feel the excitement of my wolf as the man sat back on his heels, watching me. He looked entertained but not as excited as I felt. My hands were still behind me, holding my back off the rocks, and my knees were bent as I held my injured butt off the rocks.

Any redness in my cheeks promptly burned down my neck and over my chest as I realized my position. His eyes roamed over me greedily, stopping to examine the thin see-through bralette I was wearing and the mismatched thong.

The way I saw it, the less fabric to clean and dry, the better. But now I was second-guessing everything. Nudity wasn't uncommon for Lycans or wolves, but he didn't smell like either one.

I took in another deep breath, my muscles tensing. I may not interact with their kind often, but I recognized them when I crossed one. They had a subtle undertone of pine.

A bear shifter.

He tore his gaze away from me, and somehow that made me feel even more exposed than when he was staring. I wanted his eyes on me. I wanted to know that my mate liked what he saw... even if I was propped up like I was ready to crabwalk.

Classy.

The man pushed his wet hands through his black hair, clearing the strands back from his forehead. I was hypnotized.

If he could make something that simple look so sexy, I was doomed.

I scampered to my feet, determined to make the most out of meeting my mate, but I couldn't do that covered in slime. I dove back into the water, arching my back slightly and straightening my legs. Maybe he would enjoy the sight I offered as much as I enjoyed watching him.

The cold water in the hot summer heat was exactly what I needed to regain my composure. So far, I had done nothing to attract him to me, and I wanted to make a lasting impression.

As I broke the water's surface, I noticed he was now standing, and giddiness filled me at the prospect of him joining me. Perhaps he was as excited about finding me as I was about finding him.

His pink lips were turned up in a smirk, and I couldn't tell if he was happy or if the look was because he knew something I didn't.

I sank down until the water touched my neck, using my hand to discretely wipe over my chest to ensure there wasn't any evidence left of my time with the troll.

He crossed his arms, the faded black fabric of his shorts hung low, and I swallowed hard as he raised an eyebrow at me, openly curious about what I would do next.

Did he want me to seduce him? I had never seduced anyone in my life.

My entire life, I had been waiting for my mate, the man that would love me and that I could love. There was no point in sharing myself with anyone else when nothing more would come from it beyond damaging my reputation and possibly upsetting my future mate.

Most wolves enjoyed sex like it was a sport; nothing was sacred or taboo about it. But the idea of my mate being with other women, of having to possibly face those other women one day, made me sick to my stomach. Why would I put my mate in that position if I didn't want to be in it myself?

I rose slowly, watching as his dark eyes dropped down to my scantily clad chest, where I could feel that my nipples had hardened to peaks beneath the fabric.

My arms spread out at my sides, dancing along the top of the water in a silent invitation for him to look, to join me, maybe even for him to touch.

But the amusement was gone from his face. He looked confused, almost spooked.

I raised an eyebrow at him, challenging him to make the next move.

He lifted his hand and pointed at his hair before gesturing to me. My hand flew up, and I felt it... the moment my heart stopped beating.

All arousal was gone, the blood had drained from my face, and I swallowed hard to keep the tears from welling up.

My fingers slid into the thick goo, sticking to it and making me cringe as my eyes closed.

'Don't cry, Charlie. You are better than that. You are a princess, heir to the crown, and nothing, not even having your hair full of troll snot, should embarrass you.' My pep talk didn't work, and I let my head drop back, my chest pressing out toward my mate as I quickly ran my fingers through the long, curly strands of brown hair to clean them.

I kept my eyes closed, not ready to face him again until I collected my thoughts and emotions. He didn't need to see all of my crazy right away.

My lungs shook with nerves as I lifted my head slowly, my hair heavy with water that loudly dripped back into the river.

The harsh afternoon sun began to rapidly heat me back up as I straightened, ready to try again. Meeting my mate shouldn't be this difficult. He was made for me by the Goddess, and I had no reason to be so nervous.

My eyelids cracked open slowly, and I took a deep breath before glancing at where he had been standing. The empty river bank made my stomach twist into a knot, and I rushed to the side and lifted myself out of the water. The breeze had shifted, and my mate's scent was gone...as was he