

The Beast And The Blessed

Chapter 185

Nine: Damien

Damien P.O.V.

Five men.

She lived with five men who snored louder than most bears. It wouldn't have been a problem if I hadn't found myself back at her camp listening to them for the past few hours after they had all gone to sleep. Four were in tents, but the smallest one slept by the low burning fire on a bedroll.

He didn't seem to be bothered by the drop in temperature once the sun went down and snored the loudest. It disrupted the peace of the night and reminded me of why I enjoyed the solitude of my cabin. I loved hearing the chirping of the crickets and the cooing of owls. I liked the sound of birds in the morning and how the wind would whistle through the trees.

It could be a little lonely at times, but it was peaceful.

I had crossed the river and shifted into my beast, only to sit about ten meters from Charlotte's tent upwind. Even with the space between us, I could hear her teeth chattering and the tiny whimpers that left her perfect lips as she slept.

I wondered how she would react if she woke up to me climbing into her small one-person tent and curling around her to share my body heat. After what happened today, I didn't think it would go over well.

She would either tell me to get out, or we would wake up the rest of her camp as we finished what we had started by the fire earlier. I would give anything to have her wrapped around me again. But I was also trying to be responsible.

The same concerns had been swarming my head since we first crossed paths.

We clearly came from different social standings, and she deserved better than a cabin or house in the woods, even if she was sleeping in them for the time being. That wouldn't be permanent. I knew one day Charlotte would end up back in society with a house filled with everything she could ever want and men falling over themselves to get her attention.

She wanted her soulmate, and I wasn't that.

She was a wolf, and I was a bear. Our kinds didn't get along, and I couldn't imagine how difficult that would make our children's lives.

I closed my eyes tightly, shaking my head as I tried to get the image of Charlotte holding our baby from my mind. Having those thoughts so soon wasn't healthy, and I couldn't do that to myself or her. Did she even want kids?

She was easily the most attractive woman I had ever encountered, and the way she took control today was the hottest thing I had ever experienced. Our mutual attraction felt like two flames crashing together, ready to burn down this entire forest.

The sound of someone moving made me tense, and I watched as one of the men exited their tent. It was late, so I knew they weren't up for the day. Probably heading out to take a leak.

It was the man she had been training with. I had heard her address him as Roman, but she and I hadn't talked about any of the men...or talked at all. That was something that bothered me. I wanted to know her. It was a burning need in me to learn everything I could about her.

If I didn't, how would I know if she was a match for me? Pushing aside all of the things that would prevent us from being together, even if they were a factor in my decisions, I didn't know her well enough to see if we would be compatible beyond our insane physical attraction.

He moved toward me slowly with his hands in the front pockets of his jeans. His eyes locked with mine, and my body relaxed. He could be a threat if he wanted to be, but nothing about his demeanor told me he was here to cause trouble.

Roman reached me, sitting on a tree stump about seven feet in front of me and to my right. His forearms rested on his knees, and his hands were clasped together.

"She's told us about you." There was no tightness or anger in his voice. He was simply stating a fact, and I appreciated that he didn't come out here with hostility or aggression. A man in his line of work with a level head and temper was rare, and I would hear him out. "Damien, right?"

I stared at him for a moment before nodding my head. My body shook as I began the shift to my skin, but he held his hand up to stop me.

"No need, man. It's pretty cold out here tonight."

I appreciated it but shifted anyway, wanting to show him the same respect he had shown me so far. "You're Roman," I stated, pulling on the pair of shorts I had brought and left by the tree. After squeezing into that scrawny, pretty boy's pants this morning, I made sure to come prepared this time." How did you know I was here?"

Charlotte's tent was silent beyond her soft breathing and occasional shivering, and I worried she knew I was here too. Would it bother her that I was out here, and why did the thought of her catching me watching over her embarrass me? She hadn't come out to see me. Perhaps she didn't want to see me.

"Diego saw you and signaled me," Roman explained, not looking back over his shoulder to the man still snoring on his bed roll, the only one not in a tent to have been able to spot me. Diego's mouth was open, and his pinky twitched. I would have never guessed that he had ever woken up, let alone that he had communicated with someone.

"Through your pack link?" I clarified. I knew wolves had them, but bears didn't. They had always fascinated me; it was how the Lycans had

managed to take control of the world. They and the wolves were always so fluid and in synch when in battle because they could communicate and plan attacks with only a thought. Something no one else could tap into or use against them.

"We aren't a pack. But you don't live the way we do without having other ways to communicate with each other discretely."

Roman cleared his throat. "Charlie can be a very stubborn woman."

I nodded, having seen that for myself when she came after me the first week. She saw something she wanted and didn't want to let it go. It was empowering that she felt that way for me, and one of the things that intrigued me about her.

"She is one of the strongest women I have ever met. She has put up with a lot of shit in her life, but I've never seen her cry until you showed up."

Roman's words felt like a dagger sinking into my gut, and I had to restrain myself from stepping back.

I had known she was upset that I didn't feel the bond she claimed was between us, but to have made her cry left a sickening feeling in my chest. That had been the last thing I wanted.

"When I was a teenager, I was head over heels for a girl in my pack." I raised an eyebrow at him. This was not how I expected this conversation to go, but Roman continued. "She was everything I ever wanted until she rejected me for my best friend. The feeling of our bond being severed was so severe that my wolf faded, and I tried to kill myself a few months later."

I stared at him, the whites of his eyes faintly bloodshot from exhaustion, but he didn't look as upset as I had imagined. This was a man who had lived with pain for so long that it became normal for him, a part of life he just had to live with.

What was I supposed to say to that? The guy just hit me out of nowhere, in the middle of the night, with the story of the most traumatic moment in his life. I had been expecting the big brother talk, not... this.

"I'm sorry you experienced that," I said, and I meant it. I couldn't imagine the kind of pain one would have to be feeling to attempt to take their own life. No one deserved that.

He chuckled, but it sounded emotionless and forced. "I'm not saying that happens everytime someone is rejected. All I want you to consider is that I have the experience to back my words when I say, don't reject Charlie unless you are not only willing to live with the pain yourself, but you are willing to put her through it. It doesn't fade with time. If anything, it gets a little worse with each passing day that the bond placed by the Goddess is dismissed. Give yourself a chance to get to know her. You won't be disappointed. The Goddess chose Charlie for you for a reason."

My body felt tense, and I was instinctively defensive. Roman, nor anyone else, had the right to assume I would reject the will of the Goddess.

I couldn't feel the bond for myself, but I was still here. I wanted to ensure her safety and get to know her to see if we were compatible. If I were going to reject the possibility of a mate bond, I would have done it by now. "It doesn't always work out. You were disappointed."

Roman shook his head, looking bothered by my sudden retort. "No, it doesn't always work out. Nothing is guaranteed, but the difference is that my mate left me for power. Charlie.... Charlie has already had a life people could only dream of, and she was willing to walk away from it for happiness. You, as her mate, would make her happy. She would live and die for you. She would give you the world in the blink of an eye."

I couldn't even fathom a connection and love that deep. To live and die for someone was a lot of pressure.

Roman was coming from a good place, and while I knew he hadn't intended it, I was filled with guilt. I couldn't subject Charlotte to that constant pain, but it also didn't seem fair that I would be required to stay with her if things didn't work out just to keep that pain from her.

My only option was to continue as we were, slowly spending more time together and getting to know each other. We didn't need to make any decisions right away. We would take it one day at a time.

"I hear you." It was all I could say to let him know I would take his words under advisement without directly telling him to mind his own business. He cared for her and wanted her happy and safe. I appreciated that because I wanted the same thing.

Roman nodded at me before pushing his hands on his knees and getting to his feet. "Thank you."

As he walked away, I shifted back into my fur, the sound of Charlotte shivering still reaching me. I would have to do something about that.