

The Beast And The Blessed

Chapter 171

Sixty-Four: Joselin

Joselin's P.O.V.

A tired and grumpy Tobias greeted me the next morning. It was wise for everyone to stay out of his way, which meant they also stayed out of mine. It was amazing.

It helped that everyone was scared of him too. Cyrus practically shook like a leaf when Tobias lunged at him for bumping into me. Still, I had a feeling the shaking was more due to Cyrus's exhaustion and excessive caffeine intake over the past two days than anything else.

My mate was being even more protective today, and I was ready for this to be over so I could face the next challenge... the possibility of a baby. The more time that passed, the more I opened up to the idea, but I couldn't focus on it until Cora was dealt with.

Natalie insisted that we all leave the conference room after an early morning and head to the dining hall for breakfast, insisting that it would be good for our people if we would all show our faces. They needed to see that Cyrus was okay and that we weren't worried...even though we were.

Aisha and Margot stayed behind with Blanche to keep working. Since they usually ate in the private dining hall anyway, it wouldn't seem odd to the pack that they weren't with us. Once we returned, they would turn in and get some sleep while we took over.

As Cyrus entered the room, the volume dropped drastically. Everyone seemed to want to get a look at him. He forced on a smile and walked with his head held high. Still, the black circles under his eyes and his slow movements gave him away. He was weak, tired, and traumatized.

The room had been cleaned and was back to its former glory after the attack, with no trace of his blood anywhere, whereas it had been absolutely everywhere before. After what Cora did with it, I was sure he wasn't happy that someone had to clean up his blood or could have it again.

I had given him an enchanted necklace, similar to the one Natalie and Killian wore, but it was to prevent someone from controlling him. He hadn't been controlled when she tried to take his powers. She was playing with dark magic and was trying to steal his abilities, not control them. I had little faith that it would do anything for this situation, but he looked relieved to have it.

The pack was no stranger to talking about others, but they at least had enough decency to do it through the pack link and not to the person's face.

Yet as we waited for our plates to be served, the room's tension was almost palpable. Everyone was waiting for a repeat of the other night or a breakdown from the spell caster swaying with exhaustion in his chair.

My stomach had tossed and turned since I had woken up, and my mouth watered with the need for me to empty the already hollow organ. But I had held it down.

A few bites in, I felt better, but slow and steady would win the race. Any faster, and I would lose my breakfast in front of the entire pack.

If it were possible, I would say that Cyrus was eating slower than I was. But after watching him for a moment, I realized that he wasn't eating at all, just pushing the food around his plate.

I disliked Blanche, not because she was a bad person, but because she was annoying. Yet, I still hoped that she would help Cyrus come back from this, even if that meant I had to have her around more often.

The fact that Cyrus was alive at all was a testament to how strong and powerful he was. If Cora were to try to face him head-on, she would be in for one hell of a battle. But she had potentially grown more powerful with Rona's magic, and since she hadn't been able to kill him with it, she would either need a stronger conduit or become more powerful herself.

My hand shot out and gripped Tobias's forearm as I stared at the food before me. "It's about power. That's what Rona was to her and what each location has in common. We knew that, but I didn't piece it together until now. I thought it was what she got from each place, but she's not getting anything. She's looking for something; if she had found what she was looking for, she wouldn't still be running around."

My chair slid loudly against the floor, and I rose to my feet. All eyes were on me as I bent forward and shoved a few bites of food into my mouth. It was just enough to satisfy my empty stomach.

I chewed and swallowed quickly before rushing out of the room. Tobias was hot on my heels, and I could hear Cyrus, Killian, Natalie, Aurora, and Henry close behind.

The guards quickly opened the conference room doors before me, and I ran through them. Aisha, Blanche, and Margot jumped at the sudden intrusion.

"We've been looking at this all wrong. Cora knows she won't survive if she comes here and tries to take Cyrus or fight us head-on. She used the witch in the mountains with one of Cyrus's things because she didn't know who he was yet. When that failed, and I brought him here for protection, she figured out who he was but knew she couldn't get him out of there unnoticed. She went to Rona to use her as a conduit because she had more power, but Rona wasn't strong enough." I flung my hand toward the map, pausing briefly when I saw Tobias standing with my mostly full breakfast plate in his hands.

He lifted it slightly with raised eyebrows, silently telling me he wanted me to eat more.

My head shook as I regained my train of thought. "She isn't getting anything from these locations, and she isn't setting traps. The one thing these places have in common is a significant event that could be used as a power source. Cora is looking at places of power for a new source to channel Cyrus through. She is looking for the Sanctum of Light! We just need to get there before she does!"

"Hasn't she been there before?" Natalie asked, but both Killian and Aurora shook their heads.

"Not many people knew the location of it. The council was never with my father when he attended meetings nearby, and no one beyond guards came with us when you shifted." Killian told her, and I nodded. "When my father found out about it, he forbade anyone from going there or documenting it. I think it was to protect the descendants, but I couldn't be sure."

Talia used to pawn me off, saying she was too busy for me and that I needed to learn as much as possible. She would send me with the guards and the previous king on his travels, even when she didn't join us. He would feed and shelter me, but I was really on my own whenever she sent me away.

Killian and I would then run off and play. He hated those meetings as much as I did, maybe even more.

One day we discovered the Sanctum of Light. It was the most beautiful place we had ever seen, and the pull to it was intoxicating. I wanted to both be there and run away from it at the same time. Yet, it never deterred us. We would run inside and play for hours until it was discovered that we had snuck away and would be ordered to return.

The Goddess blessed the cave and was more powerful than any place on Earth. The descendants of the Goddess hadn't even been able to leave it for long stretches. It fed their magic and kept them alive.

Natalie had been the first of her bloodline to live fully outside the Sanctum and not lose her powers or die.

Her birth mother, Aurora, had to return to the Sanctum to recharge frequently, and it sounded so tedious. But her power..It was out of this world. Natalie's too.

"How sure of this are you?" Killian asked, his arms crossed over his chest.

"I would say a solid ninety-five percent." I wasn't arrogant enough to say one hundred. I could be wrong, and whatever we planned, we needed to be prepared for the possibility of that.

"Alright. Let's all take a seat and devise our plan." Killian held out the chair for Natalie before taking his seat.

I smiled when Tobias did the same for me, placing my plate before me. No one batted an eye when I continued to pick at my food over the next half an hour as we discussed tactics.

Ultimately, I found myself with Henry, Aisha, Margot, three of the most trusted warriors, and a furious Tobias. He scared everyone to bits when I said I would be going. The "No," that came out of him even made Killian flinch. It was so loud, guttural, and angry.

It sent a thrill right through me, one it was not the time or place for.

I won that argument, and as we entered the Sanctum, I began worrying. Never before had I been scared when entering a battle or a fight. I had always been confident and sure. I had been excited to draw blood.

But there was the slight possibility that it wasn't just my life I was risking.

I refused to allow Natalie and Killian to attend in case they had a pup on the way. The irony wasn't lost on me that I would be going, but I had no other choice. If anyone would take down Cora, it was going to be another member of the council.

Cyrus needed to stay far away in case things went south. Knocking some blood out of her hand was one thing, but it would be another if she had her greasy little hands on his person. No. He needed to stay behind.

The bright white moon flowers that covered the cavern walls reflected the sun through the small opening above, illuminating the room in a pale glow. The exposed sections of the wall had rough crystals of all colors. The low ones looked semi-polished, as if someone had rubbed them obsessively over the years. The rest were broken and jagged, guaranteed to draw blood.

My body warmed just being in here, and I knew from when I played in here as a kid that the feeling would fade once I got used to it. Tobias and the rest of the Lycans weren't fairing too well. A line of sweat had broken across their foreheads, and a few warriors were shaking.

If we didn't need our presence to remain a secret, I would have told them to wait outside until Cora arrived.

Henry looked ready to burst out of his skin, but I knew that was because he was so far away from Aurora. Her role was to make a subtle show of leaving for the Sanctum, leaving a trail for Cora to follow. Once Cora was inside, we would end this.

I wiped the back of my hand across my forehead, removing the sweat that had gathered there as I eyed the stream that split the green grass. From experience, I knew the water would be hot. It was a natural hot spring, leaving the air humid and thick, but dipping in there as a kid had been the most rejuvenating feeling.

"We don't know how long she will take to get here. You should get some rest." Tobias said, gently pulling on my shoulder to force me back between his legs as he rested against the rock wall, out of sight of the entrance.

"I am fine," I thought to him, but sank back into his body anyway, my fingers combing through the grass. The warmth of the cavern mixed with his body heat should have been unbearable, but the comfort of his touch and smell had me relaxing as we waited.

It was late afternoon when Tobias placed his hand over my mouth and woke me from my sleep. A rush of adrenaline coursed through my body as Aurora entered the Sanctum. She would stay here for a short time before making a show of leaving as if she were to return home.

The energy in the cavern shifted, the air feeling more electric. We all knew if my theory was correct, then after Aurora left, it was only a matter of time before Cora would arrive.