

The Beast And The Blessed

Chapter 182

Six: Charlie

Charlie's P.O.V.

It was like I was doomed to make the same mistakes repeatedly.

Twice. Twice in two weeks, I had returned to camp covered in another creature's bodily fluids. Only this time, it wasn't because of my carelessness.

I had gone savage.

All of my pent-up anger and emotions were set free, and I unleashed a fury on the Oread that I hadn't known I had in me. My parents, brother, and every tutor I ever had would have been appalled by my behavior today.

It thoroughly impressed the men, and they sat back and watched as I dropped my sword and took the woodland nymph on in hand-to-hand combat.

I knew my team wouldn't let anything happen to me. They would have jumped in if I were about to get seriously injured. But they didn't have to.

Typically, I made executions quick.

But one thing Roman insisted on was training to be better when unarmed. I could take almost anything down with a blade, whether a sword or a dagger. But going into one of those fights without a weapon was a suicide mission.

The Oread was unstable and weak enough that I knew she would be an excellent creature to start with, and she was. Her disease-ridden body and manic state made her attacks sloppy and easy to predict.

I had maintained the upper hand during our scuffle until she collapsed and fell onto me.

Woodland Nymphs were known for being one with the woods. Their skin had spots of growth with moss, mushrooms, and flowers. If one were to touch it, the growth tended to leave a thick green residue behind, staining anything it came into contact with.

Similar to a tree, and probably the one she was bound to, she was diseased. Her body had been rotting, stinking to the high heavens.

When she collapsed into me, her rotten moss-covered body pressed against my front with a squishing sound that would be burned into my memory forever. But the smell, oh Goddess, the smell was horrendous.

There was no way I could go to sleep without rinsing off first. Even having my dirty clothes near the camp would keep everyone awake from the putrid smell.

I knew the river was safe during the day, but I had never had a reason to inspect it at night. Several creatures only came out when the sun had gone down, and the water couldn't be seen through. But it was a risk I had to take.

The night vision my wolf granted me allowed me to see several feet into the running water, and after determining the coast was clear, I waded in. It was the first time that the cool water had been unwelcome. It felt unreasonably cold without the sun, and I knew getting out to sleep with wet hair would be horrendous.

Still, I walked forward until I was able to submerge myself completely. Grabbing fistfuls of sand, I began scrubbing at my clothes. The faster I could get this over with, the better.

I wanted to be as far away from my mate's side of the river as possible. Today had been a nice distraction, but Roman had been right.

I hadn't even been officially rejected. Yet, the pain of what had happened hadn't lessened at all. Even when I was mid-fight, the bear with the black hair and eyes was on my mind.

A disruption in the water made my eyes open. I squinted as I tried to see what creature had joined me and what fight I was in for, but the bubbles from their movement obscured my vision. Just as I pushed off the bottom, a large arm wrapped around my waist and pulled me against him.

I hadn't been deep. The deepest part of the water was only six feet. But I had been completely submerged to clean myself and my clothes with the sand as quickly as possible.

Sparks erupted along my skin, and I melted into the touch even though I knew better.

My hair washed away from my face as I tilted my head back upon breaking the surface.

"What the hell are you doing?" The deep, familiar voice made me gasp, not out of shock but from the wave of desire it sent rushing through me as our bodies pressed together beneath the surface.

My hands grabbed the back of his neck, holding him closer. I blinked several times as the water ran down my face.

He was here.

"Why are you here?" I gasped, feeling him moving us closer to the shore until the water only went up to our shoulders.

"I... I came to return your dagger. I wasn't expecting to find you trying to drown yourself!" He sounded furious, but with his arms wrapped around my back, I could feel his fingers digging deeper into my sides.

"What?" I shook my head, thoroughly confused and trying to hide my amusement.

"Do you know how terrifying that was to see? I walked up, and you were under the water, struggling! I thought something had dragged you down!" I figured his yelling would have alerted the men from camp, but the world was silent beyond our heavy breathing.

"I wasn't trying to kill myself," My voice came out in a whisper as understanding dawned on me. Whether he understood it or not, he felt the mate bond too. It was why he came back to the river at all. He could have turned around and walked away when he saw me here, whether I was underwater or not. He could have either kept or gotten rid of my dagger. It would have fetched him a reasonable price in town. He also didn't need to jump into the water to fight an unknown, nonexistent creature for my freedom.

His eyes scanned over my face, looking concerned and confused. When they landed on my lips, I couldn't help but lick them, even though they were already wet from being in the water.

"You weren't?" His question made me smile, and as he watched my lips curve up, he relaxed. But he didn't let go, and I didn't want him to.

"No, I was cleaning Nymph slime from my clothes." I wanted to tell him he hadn't hurt me that bad when he said he didn't want me. Not bad enough to make me suicidal. I would never let a man bring me to that point. But with how tight he was holding me and how close his face was to mine, I couldn't find it in me to bring it up.

Going back to the subject of being mates, before I had a chance to win him over would just be asking for him to reject me.

I knew he would just shut down on me again once I mentioned it. He nodded slowly, forcing his eyes away from my lips but not letting me go. 'Oh.'

The flow of the river pushed my legs further against his, one slipping between his. I pulled them back and then wrapped them around his waist. His eyelids lowered, and he made a low noise in the back of his throat, making my core heat.

There was a moment when I thought he would push me off him, pull us out of the water, and leave me here to return to his den. But he didn't. Once again, surprising me with his actions.

I had no idea what to expect from this man, which was terrifying.

How was I supposed to make him happy when I didn't know what he wanted?

"Tell me your name." My face moved closer to his, and I wanted so badly to steal a kiss but knew I couldn't. He had made it clear that he didn't want me.

Now, just because he was confusing me with mixed signals, it didn't give me the right to kiss him without knowing it was what he wanted first.

"Damien."

My eyes closed, and I felt the tip of my nose brushing against his from our proximity, but neither of us was pulling away.

Damien. It suited him.

It was a strong name, one that matched the man, and as I repeated it in a soft and unintentional sigh of happiness, he shivered. "Damien."

I opened my eyes as his hands slid from my hips to hold me up by my butt. Damien didn't look embarrassed as he gripped me firmly, pressing my hips into his. Instead, he let out a low growl when I adjusted my legs and locked my ankles behind him, unintentionally rubbing my core against his hardness.

I could feel how large he was, and a shiver went down my spine in anticipation, even though I knew nothing more would happen. I couldn't let it, not when he didn't want me.

Even touching him now would make it harder to walk away later when he rejected me. Having sex with him would completely destroy me.

Not just mentally. I knew if I let things go too far, Damien would ruin every other man out there for me. No one would make me feel or satisfy me the way I knew he would.

"Charlotte." He groaned as one of his hands slid up my back and laced through the hair on the back of my head. When he pulled my head back, I looked up at the stars, practically panting when he ran his nose up my neck.

"Yes," I moaned, unsure if I was responding to him groaning my name or encouraging him to continue and take what he wanted from me. He was so close to where my mate's mark would lay, and my hands pulled his head closer to me until his lips gently brushed against my skin.

"Why?"

I knew exactly what he was asking. He wanted to understand why the Goddess had paired us and why he felt this way toward me when he didn't know me. But I wanted to hear him say it.

"Why what, Damien?"

"Why does it feel like this?" His hand pulled on my hair harder, and a cry of pleasure escaped my lips. I pressed them together, not wanting any of the men in camp to hear me and come down to ensure my safety.

I almost sobbed with happiness when he ran the tip of his tongue over my neck. It was the smallest yet most erotic thing I had ever experienced.

"Because we are soulmates." My thighs tightened on his hips, knowing I had said the wrong thing as soon as the words left my lips. It wasn't what he had wanted to hear. Damien had made it clear the last time we had spoken that he didn't believe in the mate bond for his kind.

As I expected, he dropped his hand from my hair, placed it back on my butt, and slowly walked through the water. When we were standing on my side of the river, he rubbed his hands from my butt along the underside of my thighs until he had reached my knees and gently pulled.

My legs loosened, and as I lowered them to the ground, Damien grabbed my wrists and untangled my hands from his hair.

I felt like a puppet, unable to move on my own and using all of my strength to keep my heart from breaking once more.

"I will take my dagger back now." As the breeze hit my soaked body, I crossed my arms over my chest to stay warm. My goal of distracting him from a possible rejection again seemed to work as he looked back to the other side of the river.

Between the pale moonlight and my night vision, I watched as his cheeks and the tips of his ears darkened. His hand went down as he adjusted himself, making me blush too. I was proud that I had that effect on him.

"I'll return it to you later."

Later. I tried not to hum in excitement that Damien was volunteering to see me again.

"Okay, I'll see you later," I whispered, stepping back.

He nodded before turning and walking down the rocky beach, up the bank, and to the fallen tree. I waited for him to make it across before even considering returning to camp to change my clothes.

Damien glanced at me one last time, and I felt victorious when one corner of his mouth moved up as I waved.

He didn't reciprocate, and before I hit the tree line, I looked over my shoulder to see him running his hand over his mouth and jaw. He shook his head and walked away from me as giddiness swarmed in my stomach. His hands were empty, as was the band of his shorts.

My dagger was nowhere in sight