

Confronting the Beast

Weeks after the Bladenboro incident ...

A cold sweat claims Chris's forehead as he slowly pushes himself up from the bed. His calmness betrays the quick rise and fall of his chest but perhaps that is due to his acceptance of this. With half-sleepy movements, he reaches for his phone and maneuvers to his music playlist. The sounds of *Bitter Sweet Symphony* flood the room, causing Chris to snort but like he hoped, it helps to center him. The need to escape this place and run towards a beast that whimpers for him begins to fade. But the pain in his heart does not. Nor do the memories that come rushing in.

The one question he keeps asking himself is when. When will these thoughts finally leave him be? When will the memory of BB release him? Not all nights are as bad as these. Some nights see him sleeping without a problem. But then there are the days where he hears an animal whimpering, or one of the others say something so small yet so devastating to his psyche. He grins and laughs or shows as much concern as he needs to in order to avoid their concerns, or Sydero's teasing.

What did he have to be traumatized about? They saved him before anything could happen. With everything else going on, why would that one thing cause such a great issue? He's been kidnapped by werewolves, beaten up by demons, and has watched others die. BB is just another creature that fell at their hands.

Yes. All of that made sense. But the logic no longer did anything for him, or at least it didn't make him feel better. No matter what he told himself, the pain is still there. The pain and loss and disgust.

He shivers, bringing the covers closer to his body as those crystal blue eyes appear in his mind. Everything within him wants to feel disgust but it is near impossible. His heart sinks and something deep wishes that he had joined the creature. But are those his thoughts or the thoughts of him turning into a beast? It seems impossible to voice just how much BB's whimpering tore at his heart. It's as if he's watching his own mother die, begging him for help he cannot provide.

He wipes at his eyes absentmindedly, shocked to find his hand wet. This entire situation left him feeling vulnerable and violated. And the more he thinks about it, the more he sees his own reflection glaring at him. It's his fault. All of this is his fault. The sobs drown out music that seems all too eager to let it. And he realizes that it will be another night where he loses the battle.

Death

Death doesn't remember what loneliness was. They have been surrounded by life and the ghosts of the living for so long that such a feeling has never crept into their being again. But there are days when they go back to those moments. Those moments where it all began, they sat alone, watching as Fate pulled away. Watched as the greater being fled to the skies, and the last thing they remembered seeing was the wisps of the being. Death didn't realize that would be the last time they saw the being who placed them here.

In those passing days, all had been silent. Death sat in contemplation, trying to understand not only what they were but their purpose. And then, it had all come tumbling down onto them at once. As life began to flourish, so did the overwhelming curiosity and need to investigate and be around them. Each breathing creature and living flora tugged on them, beckoning to be explored.

The first death was that of a creature Death would never know the name of. And was the only death caused by their hand. They watched as it kicked on their shell, attempting to gain freedom, but it was stuck. Death, in a wish to help, pulled on the shell, and just like that, life left the creature, and Death felt an odd pull. What seemed like an illusion before them as multiple dimensions conflicted with this one creature. Only when they acted on it did it all begin to focus, and the creature before them was nothing more than a spirit. It gazed around without understanding but looked to Death with kind and large eyes, hoping that this odd being would aid it. They touched themselves in confusion, but that illusion never came upon them, nor did the pull exist.

The realization had caused Death to wander for days. Sentenced to forever be an onlooker and never a participant. Death quietly watched from the sidelines. Watching as beings lesser than they would play at creation and war. Observed as betrayal,

hatred, and a lust for power reigned supreme. But Death did not interfere. Again thinking of that creature from the egg. So Death simply watched and wandered. Despite the toxicity that permeated the air around these beings, they also found places of incredible beauty and life. Found others who craved peace and knowledge. And it was them who they found themselves admiring. Those with simple lives and machinations.

Years went by, and Death learned its lesson. Decades passed, and Death gained a new understanding of the world and those who populated it. Centuries went on, and Death watched from the side, understanding that no matter how much they wanted to intervene, they could not. Soon, that need lessened. Replaced by an understanding of duty.

Death doesn't remember what loneliness is. But they will one day meet again. Silence will one day settle back in, and with that, Death can only hope that the one pull they have never felt will finally touch them.