

Chapter 124

The journey to Redwood was faster than Marisol expected. She had wanted to bask at the moment and feel every emotion as she embarked on a new chapter of her life.

Most females would have been afraid to leave. They would have been terrified of the unknown, but Marisol had been trained her whole life to lead. She had been in the Dark Moon all her life and felt that she was ready to take on new adventures.

Most people only saw the part where her parents doted on and pampered her, and never the behind-the-scenes of her training and lessons with both her parents and pack members. So they'd expected her to be a brat.

Sometimes, she let them believe it and played the perfect part. Other times, she allowed herself to stun them. She wondered what person she should take on in Redwood. She looked at the profile of her mate and was stunned. It was as if she was just seeing him for the first time.

He wasn't what she expected her mate to look like. His dark hair was slicked back, his grey eyes were focused on the road ahead, and his pristine dark suit showed class.

He looked like someone who lived by strict rules and principles. She didn't know if she found that comforting or a bit scary.

As soon as they crossed the Dark Moon's border, Marisol felt fatigued. She yawned a couple of times and placed her head on Caleb's shoulder.

"I'm tired," she murmured. It was so unlike her.

Caleb stroked her hair gently, "You had a big party last night, Marisol, and you'd also been in charge of everything. You're supposed to have rested."

Marisol sighed. He had a point. Yesterday was a big day. It was probably one of the biggest in her life. And she would have rested properly if they hadn't found each other. Instead, she spent all night thinking about him.

Coupled with the unease from her nightmares, she had worked tirelessly to make the ball a successful one. Up till that moment, Nicole had always been the one in charge of the annual ball. Marisol felt that she needed to prove to both her parents that she could indeed fill their shoes in the future.

"You're right," she said, falling asleep almost immediately.

Just as they approached the borders of her new home, Marisol stirred awake. All sleep was forgotten as soon as she set her eyes on the sight before her. Her eyes eagerly drank in the serene landscape as they neared the Redwood pack's borders. The forest seemed to hum with life, lush and vibrant under the morning sunlight. She turned to Caleb, hoping to share her excitement about the beautiful scenery.

"Caleb, isn't this incredible?" Marisol exclaimed, her voice filled with wonder.

Caleb glanced at her briefly, his gaze distant, before returning to the path ahead. "Yeah, it's nice," he replied, his tone distracted.

Sensing his unease, Marisol furrowed her brow.

Crazy that she didn't feel an emotional connection to him. She should have sensed it immediately.

However, she wouldn't let her mood be dampened by such. She stuck her head out of the window, closed her eyes, and took in the fresh earth.

Her wolf was eager. It itched to trample on the rich soil. Her excitement kept piling up. She immediately regretted sleeping. She should have been awake. She had wanted to see the landscapes change as they moved from territory to territory.

"This is so breathtaking," she said as she opened her eyes, "Caleb, Redwood pack's territory is truly enchanting."

She couldn't help herself. There was no response from her mate, though.

"Should we go on foot from here? I'm itching for a run. My wolf is overly excited. That way, you can show me around."

"No!" Caleb's voice came forcefully.

She jolted back to her seat in shock. He was refusing to meet her eyes. Marisol's heart sank. Was he hiding something?

"Caleb," she said slowly.

"I'm sorry," he sighed. "I'm so distracted. There's something on my mind. I can't shake this feeling of unease."

"Are you okay? You seem... distant." She muttered.

He sighed softly, his expression troubled. "I just... I'm not sure how they'll react to us. They weren't expecting a new person. You know, being new and all."

Marisol reached out, gently placing her hand on his arm. "We'll navigate it together, Caleb. We're a team now, remember?"

Caleb managed a small smile, "Yeah, you're right. Thanks, Marisol." Yet, the unease lingered in his eyes, casting a shadow over their impending arrival at the pack.

At once, unease began to spread through Marisol's chest. Why was he afraid? Wasn't he the Alpha? She leaned back and took deep gulps. If he wasn't confident in them, why'd he propose immediately?

"You know what, let's go on foot," Caleb said suddenly.

Marisol sat up immediately, and her worries immediately melted into the background of her thoughts.

"I'm sorry for my curt response." He said, holding her hands. "It's just... being here brings back memories I'd rather forget. I never thought I'd return to this place."

Marisol scrunched her face, "What? She blurted out.

"I-I mean, the outskirts of Redwood. This forest, in particular, holds horrible memories from my youth. Being here always makes me uncomfortable."

Marisol's eyes flitted around the beautiful forest. "I'm sorry. I didn't know. Let's continue like this. There's no need to go on foot."

Caleb smiled tenderly, "Nah. It's all good. Let's walk."

The car stopped abruptly, and they were ushered out. Caleb held her, and together, they walked the rest of the way.

Although Caleb tried to engage in a conversation with her as they walked, Marisol's unease grew. She wanted to ask Caleb for details. She could sense that there was some underlying story that she needed to know. But she wanted him to tell her himself. She didn't want to appear too demanding. After all, they were still getting to know each other.

Marisol's steps faltered as she crossed into the Redwood pack territory, her heart sinking at the sight before her. The lush, serene landscape she had admired at the borders was a stark contrast to the dilapidated structures that greeted her within the pack.

Buildings stood in disrepair, their once sturdy frames now weathered and worn by neglect. The pack grounds, once possibly vibrant with life, were now shrouded in an eerie silence, broken only by the occasional wandering pack member.

Her unease deepened as she stepped further into the heart of the Redwood pack.

The pack member appeared haggard, their faces etched with exhaustion and fear. They moved about like shadows, their eyes wide with an unspoken horror, their whispers carried on the wind speaking of tales untold. Marisol sensed their unease, their collective anguish, and it sent shivers down her spine.

The pungent scent of blood, death, and fear hung thick in the air, assaulting her senses. It was a tangible presence, suffocating her as if the very essence of her nightmares had materialized around her. Her breaths came in shallow gasps, panic clawing at her chest, constricting her airways. Her body trembled uncontrollably as the memories she fought to suppress surged back with a vengeance, flooding her mind with horrors she wished to forget.

Her legs felt weak, threatening to buckle beneath her. Desperate to find solace, Marisol scanned the surroundings for a familiar face, but each gaze met her own with an equal measure of fear and despair. Tears welled up in her eyes, blurring the bleak scene before her. She tried to call out, but her voice betrayed her, trapped in her constricted throat.

"Marisol, are you alright?" he asked, his voice filled with concern as he held her tightly.

She shook her head, unable to find the words to articulate the suffocating fear enveloping her. Instead, she clutched onto Caleb's arm, seeking solace in his presence.

Was this real? It was like she'd been returned to her nightmares.

The pack members, though somber, seemed to recognize Marisol's unease. A few glanced her way, their eyes carrying a mixture of empathy and resignation. It was as if they had grown accustomed to the bleak reality of their situation, a reality Marisol was only just beginning to comprehend.

As they ventured deeper into the heart of the pack, Marisol's senses were assaulted not only by the physical decay but also by the palpable tension in the air. Whispers of hushed conversations reached her ears, words laden with fear and uncertainty.

Caleb's grip on her tightened, offering silent reassurance. Yet, as they approached what seemed to be the center of the pack, the atmosphere grew even more oppressive. Marisol felt as if the very air she breathed carried the weight of the pack's collective anguish.

She struggled to find her voice, attempting to speak through the suffocating fear. "Caleb, something's terribly wrong here," she managed to choke out, her words barely audible.

He held her tightly, trying to offer some semblance of comfort. "No. This is Redwood. Nothing's wrong."

Marisol couldn't believe her ears. She tried and failed to draw a breath.

"Caleb, this doesn't look normal. Are you sure everything is okay?" Marisol's voice quivered. She clung to him for support, her eyes searching his face for reassurance.

Caleb offered a small smile. "Marisol, not every pack is like the Dark Moon. Redwood has faced hardships for a long time. It's been a struggle, but we're working to make it better."

Marisol gulped. What did he mean by not every pack was Dark Moon? She'd also visited other packs. They weren't as bad as this.

"But this is beyond struggle, Caleb. It's like a nightmare." She wheezed.

Caleb sighed. "I know it's hard to understand, but it's not as bad as it looks. I promise you're safe here."

As Caleb spoke, Marisol couldn't shake the feeling that he was downplaying the gravity of the situation. Her pack, Dark Moon, had thrived in decades of peace, shielded by their formidable leaders. It was so different from the reality unfolding before her. The Pack members looked like they were terrorized.

"I promise you, you're safe here. I wouldn't let anything happen to you." Caleb repeated with conviction, but he refused to meet her eyes. "I'm sorry. I should have prepared you. I didn't want to embarrass you."

On hearing the shame in his voice, Marisol's heart broke. She nodded weakly, conflicted between the reality she was witnessing and the reassurance Caleb offered. She wanted to trust him, but the unsettling atmosphere around her clouded her judgment. "I-I'm sorry, Caleb. I just... I don't know what's real anymore."

He brushed a strand of hair from her face, his eyes filled with sincerity. "It's okay, Marisol. This is a lot to take in, I understand."

"I never realized how sheltered I've been," Marisol admitted with a hint of guilt in her voice.

Caleb cupped her face gently, his eyes locking onto hers. "You didn't choose where you were born, Marisol. What matters now is that we are together."

She nodded. "Okay, Caleb. I trust you."

Caleb led her through the desolate grounds, introducing her to a few pack members along the way. She was too traumatized to remember any name and face. As they walked, he shared snippets of Redwood's struggles, the challenges they faced, and the resilience that kept them going. They'd been regularly attacked by rogues. Strong wolves that had no regard for life. They'd been at war recently, too.

Despite her initial shock, Marisol began to see the strength within the brokenness of the pack.

"I'm sorry for overreacting," Marisol apologized, her earlier panic now tempered by a growing understanding.

Caleb smiled warmly, squeezing her hand. "No need to apologize, Marisol. It's a lot to take in, but I'm here for you."

He guided her towards a couple of individuals, explaining that they would give her a tour of the pack. "I need to attend to some matters, but I'll come back for you later in the day. Trust them, they'll show you around."

Marisol nodded a newfound determination in her gaze. "I'll be here, Caleb. Be careful."

He pressed a reassuring kiss on her forehead before reluctantly leaving her in the hands of the welcoming pack members.

"Careful? No Marisol. This is home. It'll be home for you too. All you need to do is get used to it." He said with a bright smile as he walked away.