

## Chapter 126

As the minutes stretched into what felt like hours, Marisol almost felt her patience drain in a literal sense. She hadn't even been here long enough, but she already felt stir-crazy. The desire to seek answers to the questions making rounds in her head remains an unscratched itch, but the promise she made to Caleb holds her back. She should trust him and do as he says.

That, and she'd grown a bit afraid of possibly getting on the nerves of the members of this pack who were never the nicest to begin with.

Reluctantly, she remains within the pale confines of the four walls of her assigned room and later resorts to unpacking as an outlet for the boredom that started to creep in. In the process of doing this, she finds something she did not remember packing.

There was a journal.... Two of them. Her mother had probably slipped those in discreetly before she had to leave. Marisol picked them up, fingers tracing over the worn covers of the journal that had been tucked carefully into her traveling bag. It brought back so many memories of her mother.

Slowly, she flipped through the pages. The scent of the familiar ink filled her with a flood of emotions. She hadn't used these journals in a long while now. One was old, dripping with nostalgia, while the other was completely new and untainted.

Marisol remembers communicating with her mother using these when she was of a younger age. Because she tended to bottle up her feelings, her mother taught her to write it all down instead of struggling and stumbling through spoken words. And sometimes, on going through her journals again, she would find that her mother had scribbled tiny replies between her own words, words of advice, affirmation, or just praising Marisol for doing so well in writing down what she felt.

It happened time and time again until it slowly grew into a routine. One Marisol began to look forward to sometime along the line.

Suddenly, she gets an idea. Rummaging through her clothes, she quickly finds a pen and flips open a fresh page, ready to write her experiences within the Redwood pack.

Seated at a small desk in her room, Marisol began to write. The scratching of the pen against the paper became a rhythm, a release for the whirlwind of emotions within her. She writes in detail, describing the dilapidated state of the pack, the uneasy atmosphere, and her growing determination to understand and possibly change Redwood for the better.

"I may not have all the answers now, but I will find a way to make a difference," she whispered to herself.

A plan forms in her mind. In the quiet moments between writing, she lets her mind wander, envisioning conversations with her parents about the challenges faced in Redwood.

She outlined her thoughts and her plans to understand and possibly influence change within the pack. Knowing her parents, she tries to envision what type of advice they would give, too.

As the last words settle on the paper, Marisol finally lets out a breath she never knew she'd been holding and glances out the window, only to be met with the inky darkness of the night. A knot of worry settles in the pit stomach. Shouldn't Caleb be back by now? He'd been gone for quite a while already.

Marisol wasn't ashamed to admit to herself that she was getting a little needy, wanting her mate by her side. They had only just found each other after all and should be fresh into what would be the 'honeymoon phase' of their relationship. Tonight, he was supposed to mark her, so they would become officially one. She was supposed to bear his scent and him, hers.

The silence in the pack house was stifling and suffocating, leaving her draped in an overwhelming sense of dread.

Where was Caleb? Why hadn't he returned? What were they hiding?

Anxiety surges through her veins and unable to just sit still any longer, Marisol rises to her feet and walks out of her room, keeping her steps as quiet as she can. The scent of the pack house was still unfamiliar and unsettling. She held onto the door handles as she peeked into the now deserted hallways, listening. It was eerily silent.

She takes a deep breath and finally begins to move. The hushed sounds of the night surrounded her as she finally picked up on Caleb's scent and followed it without a second thought. It led her through dimly lit corridors and echoing hallways.

As she walked, the stillness of the packhouse became more pronounced. The absence of life was evident with every creaking floorboard and flickering light. She tries to call for Caleb but is met with nothing but the loud echoes of her own voice bouncing off the walls.

Her heart pounds in her chest as she turns a corner and finds herself in a dimly lit hall. The air felt charged with an unspoken tension, and Marisol's senses heightened. She moved cautiously and allowed her steps to be guided by Caleb's lingering scent until she reached a closed door.

The scent was stronger here, which could only mean one thing. Caleb had to be behind this door. She lets out a heavy exhale, hesitating for a moment before pushing the door open.

The door gives way to a room just as dimly lit as the hallways she'd previously trailed. There was a light somewhere deeper in the room, casting shadows on the walls.

Marisol swallows, eyes scanning the space, searching for any sign of Caleb. Her breath catches when she finally finds him, -well, what was undoubtedly his back turned to her - he was staring out the window, gaze fixed upon the moonlit night.

"Caleb?" she called softly, a mix of relief and concern in her voice.

She doesn't miss the way his ears perk before he starts to turn slowly. Desperate for comfort, she reaches out for him, but he immediately pulls away, leaving her bewildered and grasping at the air.

"Caleb? Where have you been? I was worried," Marisol spoke, her heart thumping against her chest at his cold demeanor.

He blinks ever so slowly, face void of any emotions, "I told you to stay in your room. It's not safe out here."

Marisol frowns in confusion that quickly morphed into what could only be described as desperation. She needed her mate. She needed something comforting and familiar after a mentally draining day in a place that was obviously far too alien to her.

"But I had waited for you for hours. Something didn't feel right," she supplies.

"I was busy." Came his reply, curt and unfeeling. When Marisol takes another tentative step closer, he takes one back. "Stay back." He warns.

Ignoring his warning, she attempts to draw him into a hug, seeking solace in the familiar warmth of his embrace. However, he deftly steps out of her reach again, leaving her even more perplexed.

"W- why?" She stutters out, blinking back the tears that already threatened to spill at his harsh words and actions. "What's going on, Caleb? Why are you being like this? Did I do something wrong?" she desperately stumbles through her words, and the first shift in his blank expression came in the form of a squint.

"Have the effects of the spell not worn off yet?" he questions, voice oddly different and sending a shiver down Marisol's spine.

"W- what spell?" Marisol inquires, still inching closer to him despite his painfully obvious withdrawal.

He doesn't reply, only shakes his head with a low scoff.

"Caleb?" Marisol presses, her heart thudding against the confines of her chest as she tries once again to seek any form of comfort from her supposed mate.

His jaw ticks as their fingers brush this time before he practically glares at her, "Can you at least read the room and understand giving me some space?!" He growls, sidestepping to put more of a distance between them, and that sends Marisol reeling.

She couldn't understand anything except for the fact that she needed him close, and he was hell-bent on doing the exact opposite. He takes a few steps away, and she follows after him stubbornly, seemingly not registering his tone and only just needing the growing ache at being separated from her mate, sated.

"Oh goddess," he groans. "The effects of the spell... they haven't worn off, have they?"

This was the second time he talked about a spell, and Marisol was as confused at his words as she was agitated by his actions. What was he on about?

"What are you talking about, Caleb? I- I don't understand yo-"

"I said, stay back!" He growls harshly, seemingly having had enough of her insistence, "I don't want you touching me, I have a mate!"

Those words finally worked as the wake-up call she needed, the response a jarring blow that shook her reality. Before she could process the implication of his statement, he continued.

"I have a mate, and it is not you. Is that understandable enough for you? You're not mine." he stated bluntly.

His words hit Marisol like a storm. She feels the ground beneath her feet crumbling, the reality she had believed shattering into unsalvageable pieces that she struggles to hold onto with tears pooling in her eyes, chest heaving.

"B- but .... We are mates. I can feel it," Marisol argues.

"No, we are not, and what you feel is a lie." He said at the same time she felt her wolf claw at her, and it felt like she'd been doused with ice-cold water.

Immediately, she regained clarity, her senses sharpened, and she could now smell another wolf on him, clear as day.

"You!" She growls loudly as she leaps at him, teeth bared.

However, she had barely moved when a sharp blow to her head sent shockwaves of pain reverberating through her, and she crumbled to the ground, the world around her blurred as her consciousness slipped away and everything faded into an inky abyss.

The last thing she heard was Caleb's distant voice, a cold declaration that seemed to echo in her unconscious mind.