

Chapter 129

Caleb paces nervously around the pack's garden. Even though everything looked to be going as planned at a point, there was an underlying sense of unease he couldn't seem to shake off. The prophecy had promised solutions for Redwood, but the threat posed by Cedric only loomed closer above their heads, appearing more vicious than ever.

Ever since Marisol arrived in the pack, Cedric had only grown more feral, rage even more uncontrolled. The pack's infirmary was running out of beds, filling with injured members needing urgent care.

Caleb's concern deepened as the havoc Cedric had wrecked among the people only rose over time, and it didn't look to be stopping anytime soon.

As he paces, lost in thought, he doesn't notice his mate, Sophia, approaching, until she was close enough for her pheromones to infiltrate his senses, bringing a momentary sense of calm is with them.

"Caleb, what has got you so worried? You seemed far gone." Sophia inquires gently, inching closer with every word until she suddenly stops.

"Can't you stay away from her for a moment?" she states, wrinkling her nose.

Caleb sighs, resigned, "You know I've been away from her for the longest time now."

"Her scent has refused to leave you." She murmurs, dissatisfied, and Caleb sighs again, frustration and tiredness evident in his expression.

"I'm sorry," Sophia huffs, seemingly coming back to her senses and noting his obvious resignation and stress. "I just can't help it. I know what you had to do, but it doesn't stop my wolf from wanting to rip her head off just thinking about you being so close to her. I'm sorry." She repeats, not getting a spoken reply, only a nod, while his features remain tight with worry.

"Come on, Caleb, talk to me. I know something's bothering you."

Caleb sighed for what felt like the nth time only a few sentences into their discussion. "It's nothing new..... it's Cedric. He's become more dangerous since Marisol joined us. The pack members are not safe, and I fear his attacks will only get worse with time." He confesses, tone stiff.

Sophia places a reassuring hand on his arm, nodding in complete understanding of his plight. "Marisol's arrival might have stirred things up, but we'll find a way to handle Cedric and keep our pack safe. I believe in you..... in us."

Caleb manages a small smile at the encouraging words, "I hope so. The prophecy hinted that I could bring a solution, but I never anticipated this level of chaos."

Sophia gives him a determined look. "We'll do whatever it takes to protect our pack. We've faced challenges before, and I'm sure we'll get through this one too."

"How is she? Marisol." He resorts to asking, and Sophia doesn't hide the roll of her eyes both at the mention of Marisol and at her antics.

"Still throwing tantrums." She answers, and Caden hums.

"I assume that you put her to sleep again?"

"Yeah, at this rate, she'll be knocked out the whole time and of no use to us." She notes absentmindedly, regretting it immediately when Caleb's expression falls.

"That's my exact fear. Oh, Goddess."

She rushes to offer some comfort at that, pressing closer to him, "Caleb, I didn't mean that, I'm sure she'll acclimate with time, let's let her have that, okay?"

Despite Sophia's comforting words, Caleb's worry persists. The safety and protection of the pack and its people weighed heavily on his shoulders, and Cedric's increasing hostility was currently more of a bigger threat than he'd ever faced.

He knew they needed a solution and fast before things spiraled further out of control. At this point, he was even beginning to doubt the authenticity of the prophecy. Marisol's presence only seemed to make things worse, as far as he knew.

Suddenly, there was unease in the pack bond. It was followed by screaming, and crashing came from an indiscernible location. The commotion immediately has Caleb on high alert and attention, breaking the little bubble that had enveloped the mates.

"Cedric?" Sophia and Caleb say in a chorus, sharing a look. Just then, a few omega wolves rush into the garden, panic evident in their steps and expressions.

"She's awake, and she's furious, Luna. Come quickly before she shifts. Her wolf is powerful, and it already seems to be well in control."

They quickly informed them, and with another glance at Caleb, Sophia rushed off. Marisol should be asleep for another few hours atleast, it was odd enough for her to be awake already.

The new information reaching them didn't sound good either, and that clearly demanded Sophia's immediate attention, leaving Caleb to grapple with his thoughts in solitude, now even more frantic than before.

Alone in the garden, Caleb's mind wanders back to a time when things looked like they would be perfect forever when life held joy and excitement. He reminisced about a past where adventure was his constant companion, a time before his existence had become a hollow echo of what it used to be, owing to the heaps of responsibility he now shouldered, proving to be some kind of dead weight tied to his foot and dragging him under.

Caleb's love for adventure had led him to a pivotal encounter, one that changed the course of his life. The thrill of exploration had always captivated him, steering him away from the responsibilities of pack duties. His brother Cedric had filled that void perfectly, though, always having been oddly fascinated with matters of state and born a natural leader.

Caleb had been kept away from the pack by his need for a thrill and something new for many years. He had been away from the pack for what felt like an eternity, lost in the allure of distant horizons.

That was how he met Sophia. He'd been lost somewhere in a Rogue pack. She'd saved him from death that day, and he had rescued her from the pack subsequently.

Upon his return to Redwood, he was met with a heartbreaking and utterly devastating scene. The once-thriving pack lay in ruins, his parents were gone, his brother not entirely human, half of the pack dead while the other held joy well in death's door with the states they were in.

Caleb's thoughts drifted back to that cursed day, forever seared into his memories. He had returned to Redwood, partly because he missed his family and because he'd found his mate and had been excited to show her off, also to celebrate his brother Cedric, who, he'd gotten word of becoming the new Alpha.

It was supposed to be a happy day, a joyful reunion with an addition to the family, but instead, they were greeted with a scene that felt like the closest thing to having his heart ripped out and force-fed to him, still raw and bleeding.

The Ember Coven, a group of powerful warlocks, did not have the best of relationships with Redwood for a long time. Their leader, Phineas, saw Redwood as a challenge to conquer. Before then, Redwood was known for one thing, and that was its harmony with nature.

It was this harmony that was rumored to be the source of its peace and stability. There were also rumors of its lands bearing a source of old powerful magic. The Ember coven had also coveted that source for a long time. Their bad blood was chalked up to land disputes, and nothing too serious.

But it turned out that in Caleb's absence, a war had broken out between them. Even though Joseph, his father, and the Alpha before Cedric had tried to make peace in an attempt to discontinue the war, it never bore any positive results.

The Ember Coven were intent on letting it drag on until they got what they wanted, which wasn't an easy feat for Redwood to surrender without putting up a fight.

Sometime along the line, Phineas, the leader of the Ember coven, was suddenly struck dead. With the main instigator gone, the unrest subsided, and the entire Redwood pack released a collective sigh of relief, thinking it was over.

But the worst was yet to come, and it did come on Cedric's coronation day. Phineas's soulmate, Guinevere, blames Redwood for his death. Filled with sadness and anger, she set out to get revenge. She kills Alpha Joseph and his mate with her own hands, turning what should've been a happy day into a nightmare for everyone present.

But she doesn't stop there. Guinevere lays a curse on Cedric, making him lose his human side and turning him into what can only be described as an unforgiving beast that haunted and sought the blood of his own pack members. The once-happy Redwood Pack becomes a broken and desolate place.

Caleb still remembers how he felt when he learned about all of this. After being away from Redwood, exploring and adventuring, he'd been enraged and beyond devastated at the state he'd found his pack and only surviving family.

The worst part was that no one had been willing to let him in on all that. He didn't know of the wars or Phineas' death, even though he'd maintained steady communication with the pack and his parents, albeit in his absence. He didn't even know who Guinevere was. Worst of all, he didn't even get to bid his parents a final farewell.

Caleb is still rooted in the Garden, reliving the pain and guilt he felt back then. He wanted nothing more than to bring back joy and love back to Redwood.

Every time he looked at Sophia, he felt the guilt grow within him. This wasn't how he'd wanted or expected things to go with her back to his home with him. Sophia had been held captive in a Rogue pack all her life, and she had only known suffering.

He brought her back knowing all too well the loving bond his pack shared, hoping for her to become a part of that, share in the good times with his family and help her forget about her ugly past, not struggle once again to pick up the broken pieces of what was left of his pack, torn apart by war and hate.

The vibrant hopes of a joyous return turned into a nightmare of loss and despair. The betrayal, the bloodshed, and the curse that afflicted his brother cast a dark shadow over Redwood.

Caleb grappled with the harsh realities on his return, questioning the purpose of his existence when he couldn't even be there when his home needed him the most, so now, all he'd done and every decision he's made so far was a trial at salvation.

Caleb finds himself taking on a role he naturally would never have expected of himself. Becoming the new Alpha, especially of such a broken pack, came with a lot of responsibilities. It wasn't what he wanted, but he knew he had to try and fix all that was broken within the pack.

The weight of guilt and self-blame for what had happened to his family burdened him every day, serving as a driving force to try and do better. However, with the way things continued to swivel out of control, if he didn't know any better, he would be of the idea that he was the accursed one.

The unpredictability of his older brother, Cedric, was a constant shadow looming over his head. He couldn't even recognize him. He was seldomly quiescent enough to even look at faces, talk more, begin to recognize them. Caleb desperately wanted to help him, but the great weight on his shoulders felt like it was squeezing the air out of him.

Some pack officials wanted him to just put an end to it, let Cedric go and not continue to take the risk of him getting out of his bounds and continuously harming the pack members, but that would mean killing his own brother. Greedy as it might seem, that would also be him signing his whole life off to the responsibilities that came with remaining the Alpha of Redwood.

Now, another addition to his long list of worries was Marisol, the daughter of the most powerful Alpha. Truly speaking, he was keeping her here against her will, and if her father were to sense even the slighest hint of an irregularity, they would be in deep trouble. The fear of failure and the dire consequences of it continued to haunt every second of his day, making it impossible to think of anything else.

Night falls over Redwood, and Caleb still remains a solitary figure in the garden. Nothing else is more urgent than his troubles and thinking about them as if that would provide immediate solutions anyway. In the quiet of the night, Caleb finds himself lost in the shadows of a past stained by tragedy, unable to see a sliver of hope to dream of a brighter future.