

Chapter 130

3 months earlier

Caleb sat at his desk, surrounded by paperwork and files containing the financial records of the pack. His brow furrowed as he sifted through the incomplete and scattered information. The missing pieces, crucial for restoring the pack's stability, were nowhere to be found. The only one who might have had any idea about the information needed would be Cedric, but Cedric had long-lost his human side.

Frustration seemed to cling to every fiber of Caleb's being like a second skin every other day since the revelation, which led to him taking up this very tedious role. There was so much he had to do, from trying to restore the pack's finances to training the pack members in preparation for any potential threats, all while navigating through the chaos and reassuring the last few survivors of a day in the sun again. But how could he focus on managing any of those tasks when it looked like he'd been doing a god-awful job so far and everything still looked to be in utter disarray?

Amidst his turmoil, Sophia walks into the office, effectively breaking his train of thought.

"Hey," She greets, a soft smile on her full lips.

"Hey," he answers, a sigh forcing its way out of his lips at the ease her presence brought.

"How's it going?" She asks conversationally, approaching his desk.

He shook his head, and his palms came to rub his face tiredly. Before he could conjure up an appropriate reply, he caught a glint of something flashy held between her slim fingers. Looking back up at her, he raised a brow in question.

She smiled at that, lifting it to wave slowly in front of his curious eyes, "Dark Moon's upcoming annual ball is scheduled for next month, and we have received an invitation," she said, and Caleb's shoulders slumped at that.

He groaned, "A ball is the last thing I care about right now, Sophia." Came his grumbled answer, and Sophia regarded him with a soft, affectionate smile.

It was not lost on her just how hard and tirelessly he'd been working, and it was more than natural for him to be so burnt out and stressed. Stretching over his table, she gently shuts the pages of the documents he had been poring over and gestures for him to stand up, grabbing at his arm to urge him to do it faster at his obvious reluctance. There was an inscrutable look in her eyes. It was an indication that she knew something he didn't.

"Come with me, Caleb. Trust me, this might be more important than you think," she urges, her voice carrying a hint of excitement and mystery.

Caleb follows her, albeit reluctantly. He had no idea what her vague words meant, but he had no intention of attending a ball in the midst of all their unsolved problems. That would be as scandalous as it was a frivolous distraction. Yet, he follows Sophia because it seems like that would make her happy, and it proves to be true, seeing that a poorly concealed smile does not leave her lips the entirety of their little trip.

They made their way through the corridors of the pack house until they reached a secluded corner, where Sophia suddenly whipped around, her eyes sparkling with an air of anticipation. "Caleb, I know you're overwhelmed. But I believe this ball might hold an opportunity for us."

Caleb raises an eyebrow in skepticism. "How could a ball possibly help us when we're on the verge of all dying out?" he questions, a tone snappier than he would have liked, but Sophia didn't seem to notice, or she did a good job of pretending not to.

Sophia's smile remained unwavering. "There will be powerful potential allies at the ball, people who might have information or resources that could aid us. I believe attending this event might bring us closer to finding the missing pieces we need, or bring us closer to them at least," she explains earnestly.

Caleb hesitated, his mind filling with doubts, yet something in Sophia's unwavering conviction compelled him to consider her words, opting to keep an open mind instead of remaining resolute in his earlier decision.

"That's not all." She added, her smile widening. "Sometimes we need a break. The ball could be a momentary escape, a chance for both of us to breathe, away from all this," she finishes, waving her fingers around for emphasis.

Caleb raises an eyebrow, not exactly impressed at her conclusion. "Really? A break? We don't have the luxury of indulging in distractions, Sophia. There's too much at stake."

She reaches for his hand this time, her touch gentle but firm. "I know, Caleb. But there's something about this ball that might be different. Follow me, and I'll show you," she resumes walking after that, and Caleb follows, intrigued.

As they walked through the corridors of Redwood territory, Sophia maintained an air of secrecy, heightening Caleb's curiosity. Finally, they reached a room adorned with ancient symbols and hidden away from the prying eyes of the pack.

Sophia turned to Caleb, her eyes gleaming with a mixture of excitement and assurance. "Caleb, this room holds the answers you seek. The ball is more than a mere distraction; it could be the key to earning something that can save our pack."

Caleb's eyes widen in interest, Sophia nods. "I know it's a lot to ask, but sometimes unexpected solutions come from unexpected places," she encourages, "Let's go in."

The heavy door creaks open from the force of her push, revealing a room cloaked in shadows. As Caleb stepped inside, his breath caught at the unexpected sight before him. In the middle of a carefully drawn circle, a young woman with white hair sat, surrounded by an array of candles casting an ethereal glow over her features.

A growl rumbled in Caleb's throat as the gears whirring in his head clicked into place. Witches had become the embodiment of mistrust and fear, especially after the tragedy that befell Redwood. Many believed them to be spies for the Ember Coven, resulting in unquestioned execution if it happened that they were any found trespassing.

Anger and bafflement had his fingers balling into fists. How had a witch managed to infiltrate his pack house? The very presence of such a being stirred a mix of emotions, none of them pleasant, fueled by the painful memories that still haunted his dreams and this very pack house.

Sophia immediately steps forward, her hands reaching out in an attempt to quell his growing hostility. "Caleb, please, calm down," she urges.

The witch, seemingly unperturbed by Caleb's reaction, chuckles softly. Opening her eyes, she regarded Caleb and Sophia with an air of quiet confidence, an enigmatic smile playing on her lips.

Caleb shot an incredulous glance at Sophia. He had known about her associations with witches, but bringing one into their pack house felt like a betrayal, especially considering the risks involved.

"Sophia, how could you?" Caleb's voice wavers, heavy with the bitter taste of his frustration and disappointment. "After everything..... you're well aware of everything that happened, and you..... how could you bring a witch here?!"

"Caleb, please, just hear me out," she placates, her tone soothing and gentle. "I need you to be open-minded here, you know I wouldn't do anything to harm you or our people."

Caleb's inner turmoil grows as he stands torn between his instincts to protect his pack and his desire to understand Sophia's actions. The betrayal he felt clawed at his heart, leaving him questioning the very foundation of their relationship.

"Trust me, Caleb." Sophia spoke again, her eyes brimming with sincerity and her voice carrying a hint of vulnerability. "There's a lot more to this, and you can only listen if you stay calm. Just listen, and you'll understand."

After long, tense minutes of balling and unfurling his fingers whilst glaring at the witch, who remained unaffected, he allowed Sophia to lead him to a chair, his eyes never leaving the witch. The room seemed to pulse with an energy that he couldn't comprehend.

The witch, albeit sensing the tension and hostility he brewed with regards him with what looked like practiced composure, "Alpha Caleb, I mean no harm. My name is Leticia, and I'm here with a purpose. Your mate sought my help because she believes I can provide answers that will help Redwood."

Caleb's wariness lingered, but Sophia's plea echoed in his mind, coupled with the pleading eyes she was currently giving him as she mouthed the words, "Please, hear her out."

The witch resumes speaking after a beat of charged silence, "The annual ball holds a crucial event in the celestial alignment. It's a rare occurrence that opens a window to hidden knowledge. With your permission, I can perform a ritual during the ball that may unveil the secrets you need to save your pack."

Caleb's eyes narrowed at her words. It wasn't like he was going to just trust a witch's words, no matter how desperate for a solution he was. She could well be in cohorts with Guinevere, here with another crafty method to bring ruin to what was left of the pack after earning his trust, so he voices just that "And why would I trust a witch?"

Leticia meets his hardened gaze and holds it unwaveringly. "Because your mate believes in the potential salvation this ritual holds. And because I know the exact reason for your doubt, but not all witches are allies of the Ember Coven. I, for one, am not a fan of wars, and I hope for harmony between our kinds. Most importantly, I was led here by the moon goddess. A prophecy had been revealed to me, weighing down on my heart, and I can only be at peace when I am able to reveal it after the ritual."

What follows is silence, with Caleb staring into nothingness, processing her words, "Caleb, please," Sophia's voice is heard, "We're running out of time. If there's a chance, however small, to save Redwood, we must take it. Leticia can offer insights that might lead us to a solution."

Caleb's internal struggle raged on. The wounds inflicted by witches in the not-so-far past were still fresh, but the urgency of his plight was to be considered too.

Leticia suddenly stands up and floats toward him, the sudden closeness triggering his defensive instincts as he squares up, ready to attack if the need arises. "You must know that you do not belong here, Caleb. Your destiny is not tied to Redwood. You are no Alpha, and if things are not put back in place, you all will perish."

Caleb feels his brows twitch in irritation, and his wolf roars within him, equally taking offense at her words. However, her words were not lies. It was the bitter truth he had admitted to his own self a long time ago. He did not belong here, and he was already being suffocated with the weight of the responsibilities. Scowling, he relents, "Perform your ritual. But, if this turns out to be some kind of trick, know that I will not hesitate to do whatever it takes to protect my pack."

Leticia shrugs, seemingly unaffected by the threat as she nods, accepting his terms.

A gust of wind blows into the room as the ritual kicks into action. The flickering glow of the lit candles cast an almost eerie glow on the room that was now a sacred space, housing a mystical proceeding.

She requested locks of hair or fur from both Cedric and Caleb for the ritual. Obtaining Cedric's fur was remarkably easy, as Cedric often roamed around in his wolf form, leaving traces of fur scattered throughout the territory.

The ritual unfolded in a sequence of ancient chants and precise movements. Leticia's hands gracefully moved through the air, each gesture laden with meaning. Caleb and Sophia observed with a mix of curiosity and anticipation, their eyes focused on the intricate dance of the ritual.

Leticia arranged intricate symbols and lit candles, creating an atmosphere charged with otherworldly energy. Her white hair went between framing her face and succumbing to the wind, flying uncontrolled as she began chanting ancient incantations, and the room hummed with an ethereal resonance.

As Leticia uttered what was no doubt the final incantation, a subtle shift in the energy within the room became palpable. It was as if unseen forces converged, creating an atmosphere pregnant with mystical possibilities. Leticia's eyes, like twin moons, glowed with an otherworldly brilliance as she entered a state of heightened connection with the spiritual realm.

The moment the ritual concluded, Leticia's eyes turned as white as her hair, her head snapping up as she spoke with an ethereal resonance, her voice carrying the weight of prophecy. "Cedric can be cured, but the key lies in Marisol Hallows, the daughter of the formidable Alpha of Dark Moon. She is not only the means to heal your brother, but also the pivotal figure in the impending war against the witches, led by Guinevere and her coven."

Caleb and Sophia exchanged astonished glances. Marisol, the key to their salvation, seemed an unlikely savior. Doubt etches onto Caleb's features as he struggles to reconcile the seemingly insurmountable task that now lies ahead.

"How are we supposed to get an audience with Marisol?" Caleb questioned, the weight of uncertainty evident in his voice.

Leticia's eyes returned to their natural state, her expression serious. "You must keep tabs on Marisol. The threads of fate weave a complex tapestry, and her role in the future of both your packs is crucial. Watch her closely; the answers you seek will unfold through her actions."

Caleb's mind buzzed with the magnitude of the revelation. Keeping tabs on Marisol, the daughter of Dark Moon's Alpha, would be no small feat. The risks were high, but the desperation to save Cedric propelled Caleb forward.

In the following weeks, Caleb immersed himself in the perilous task of monitoring Marisol's movements. The challenge lay not only in observing from a distance but also in brainstorming ideas and finding a subtle way to infiltrate without raising suspicions.

Caleb and Sophia strategized their approach. "We need to be cautious, Caleb," Sophia noted, her eyes reflecting concern. "Marisol is no ordinary figure, and any misstep could jeopardize everything."

Caleb nodded solemnly, fully aware of the delicate nature of their mission. "I'll find a way, Sophia. We have no other choice if we want to save Cedric and protect our pack from impending doom."

The days turned into nights as Caleb shadowed Marisol, learning her routines, understanding her connections, and deciphering the intricate dynamics of the Dark Moon. He found himself caught between the urgency of the mission and the weight of the secrets he bore.

One evening, as the moon hung low in the sky, Caleb observed Marisol from the shadows. A sense of admiration mingled with trepidation as he witnessed the strength and grace with which she navigated her responsibilities. She carried around an air of surety and confidence. This wasn't going to be easy.

Sophia, sensing Caleb's internal struggle, approached him with a gentle touch. "This won't be easy, Caleb. But remember, it's for Cedric and the future of our pack. We can't afford to falter."

Caleb sighed, acknowledging the gravity of their predicament. "I know, Sophia. I'll tread carefully, but we must be prepared for whatever comes our way."