

## Chapter 133

Marisol is jolted back to reality by the feel of a warm sticky liquid splashed directly onto her face, causing her to wake up with a loud gasp and sit up abruptly, but instead of her room, she finds herself out in the open, on a desolate land, adding to her shock.

Her features are immediately pulled into a confused frown. She looks around as she tries to regulate her breathing. Footsteps hurried away, and loud snickers went with it.

Marisol wondered what was happening this time. Had the people of Redwood finally come to their senses and let her go? Or... maybe this was another one of their schemes coming into play again. What sick and twisted game did they have in mind this time? She wasn't excited to find out.

More sinister laughter comes as the air starts becoming misty and only now does she realize how whatever liquid she had just been doused with, oddly sticks to her face and drips down slower than she would have liked or expected. Naturally, -as natural as being woken up with liquid on your face goes - water would be expected, but this liquid felt more viscous. With that, Marisol looks down at her drenched body only to feel her heart drop all the way to her feet at what she finds.

Blood. She'd just been covered in blood. Marisol doesn't get enough time to process the fact when arms suddenly grip her from all over and begin to wrestle her back down to the cold, hard ground. Oh yeah. She didn't wake up in a bed either.

Marisol struggles and fights against it to no avail. She scratches and flails, wheezing as her throat and chest begin to clog up. With a final burst of strength, she screams as she pushes herself away and breaks through.

She rolls away from the horde, panting as she forces her knees to hold her weight. She squints, trying to examine her surroundings, and she finds it to be a run-down and weird-looking landscape. She squinted her eyes further, trying to figure out just where exactly this was, but it didn't look to be working. She had no idea where this could be.

Looking down at her now blood-covered clothes again, a drape of realization is cast over her as she stares down at her fingers, bathed in a stomach-churning red. Marisol grows a lot more livid than she'd been over the course of her stay in Redwood. These people really never just stop, do they?! They'd intended to sacrifice her? Marisol was certain that this was a ritual. There was no doubt about it.

As if to stamp her suspicions, an outer-worldly mist suddenly begins veiling the surroundings in an unsettling shroud. The ground beneath her feet grows eerily cold, and a bone-chilling breeze whispers through the air. Unease clung to her like a second skin, intensifying with each cautious step she reluctantly began to take.

The path ahead seemed to stretch endlessly into the murk, shadows playing tricks on her perception. An ominous silence accompanies her, interrupted only by the haunting echoes of her own footsteps, which reverberate with an eerie resonance. The oppressive atmosphere hints at an impending malevolence that Marisol could not quite grasp.

Abruptly, the mist thickens, enveloping her in an impenetrable fog. Panic sets in as her surroundings vanish right before her eyes, leaving her disoriented and vulnerable. It felt as though unseen hands were closing in on her, a suffocating force tightening its grip. A pervasive dread settled over her, raising the fine hairs on her arms.

Then, from the heart of the mist, a guttural growl rang out, a terrifying sound that echoed with the primal ferocity of a creature lurking in the shadows. The air, tense at it, was, brews with more tension as it becomes charged with an unmistakable threat, and Marisol's instincts scream at her to escape this nightmarish realm.

Another growl followed, then another, until it morphed into a malevolent symphony that resonated in the marrow of her bones. Marisol could almost feel her heart beating in her ears, the violent arrhythmic thuds loud enough to almost meld with the horrors unseen. A strange sort of pull continued to string her closer, its unyielding grasp only drawing her nearer and nearer to the source of the sound against her own will. Desperation fuels her attempts to flee, but her legs move as if submerged in thick sludge, each step a struggle against the unseen forces restraining her.

Through the swirling mist, a monstrous form materialized—an entity born of her deepest fears. Its colossal silhouette loomed, a grotesque amalgamation of fur and sinew, a macabre tapestry of scars and wounds etched into its monstrous hide. Its eyes, vacant and soulless, bore into Marisol, sending shivers down her spine.

The beast's breath, heavy with the stench of decay, hung in the air, creating an oppressive atmosphere that threatened to crush her. The symphony of growls reached a deafening crescendo, drowning out any rational thought. It felt as though the nightmare itself had taken a physical form, manifesting in this grotesque creature.

Paralyzed by terror, Marisol tries to scream, but her voice betrays her. The creature's approach was relentless, closing the distance with a menacing determination. As it drew nearer, so did the distorted features of its nightmarish visage grow clearer, etching an indelible horror into her consciousness.

In the throes of panic, Marisol's survival instincts continue to scream at her to escape, but the unseen shackles hold her captive. The beast's gaping jaws snapped hungrily, and she could feel its malevolent presence inching closer with every puff of its offensive breath, forcing her to hold her breath as her eyes remained glued to a creature which was no doubt an imminent threat to her very existence.

Just as the creature's monstrous maw seemed poised to consume her, Marisol broke out of that reality into another one, gasping for breath. The transition from the nightmare's clutches to reality leaves her trembling, drenched in a cold sweat. Her pulse thunders in her ears, and it takes precious moments for the residual terror to subside in the tiniest sense of it.

In the eerie stillness of the night, Marisol clutched at the sheets, her heart racing wildly owing to the scare of the nightmare that had taken a few nights off, only to return stronger than it would seem. The vivid imagery of the beast persists even behind her closed lids, haunting her waking moments as she grapples with the remnants of the surreal horror that had unfolded in her dreams.

Marisol's breathing refused to slow as she pushed herself to a sitting position on the plush material of the bed, her body shivering almost feverishly. The sheer terror of the dream had left her otherwise paralyzed in the wake of it, her thoughts consumed by the haunting image of the beast. Her longing for the familiarity of home intensifies as the unsettling reality of her situation seems to gain a stronger footing as she looks around the unfamiliar room she'd woken up to this time.

Almost whimpering, she brought her knees to her chest, hugging them as she sought any kind of warmth in the room that felt both scalding hot and icy cold at the same time, most possibly owing to her own scattered nerves. This way, she felt the erratic beating of her chest all over her body, sparing another look around the room that felt suffocating, each innocent shadow cast by the moon looking to take on a sinister form.

She finds herself regretting having not confided in her mother about the night terrors that plagued her. It was too late now, miles away from the safety of her family. She was left terribly alone with her fears.

After a few minutes pass, Marisol attempts to lay back down, to seek refuge under the warmth of her sheets, but the image of the beast's haunting eyes follows closely after, as if not wanting to be forgotten so quickly. Closing her eyes only plunged her back into the nightmare. Fear wraps its icy fingers around her, leaving her unable to escape the relentless grip of her mind.

Marisol is unable to tell when exactly it started, but her cheeks only became wetter and wetter with tears. Overwhelmed with fear and helplessness, tears continued to cascade over her waterline, her body shaking with the intensity of her sobs. She was utterly alone, surrounded by the oppressive darkness of her supposed room. The vulnerability she felt was suffocating, making her yearn for a friendly face or a comforting voice to soothe her restless soul.

As she cries herself into exhaustion, sleep eventually claims her once more, throwing her into an endless time loop where her nightmares take on a new approach, anything to provide that initial confusion before it warps into the same old horrors.

A new environment and a new scenario. The same beast and the same sense of terror and trepidation. The nightmare unfolded like a grotesque tapestry, weaving together monstrous visions that mirrored the depths of her darkest fears. The beast loomed larger and more menacing than ever, its snarls echoing in the twisted landscapes of their latest encounter.

Every step she takes in the dream feels like sinking deeper into a pit of despair. The eerie silence was punctuated by the creature's menacing growls, each one more menacing than the last. Her heart races, her breaths coming in short gasps, and she struggles to escape the clutches of her subconscious.

Her desperation is a stable constant, a relentless fear that seemed inescapable. Even as she cries out for help this time, her voice is never really released, lost in the void of her twisted dreams.

When she awoke once more, she was drenched in sweat, and she feared her heart would give up sooner than intended if it continued to work so vigorously each night. The night had been a harrowing journey through a terrifying labyrinth of her subconscious fears, leaving her trembling and more desperate than ever for a sliver of comfort and safety.

As soon as the first light of dawn painted the sky, Marisol, driven by an urgency to escape her haunting nightmares, hurries out of the pack house and into the encompassing woods. The cool morning air greets her as she ventures deeper, the trees casting elongated shadows in the emerging sunlight.

The moment seemed ripe for release, and with a trained swiftness, Marisol's body contorted into a blur of fur, embodying the untamed spirit of her wolf. The ground beneath her paws blurs as she sprints wildly, each leap pushing her closer to a semblance of freedom. Yet, even in the wild abandon of her wolf's run, the echoes of her fears lingered.

Exhaustion eventually catches up with her, both as a wolf and a human. She shifts back to her human form with short heaving breaths. The ground embraces her as she lets herself fall, a respite from the relentless chase of her own thoughts. As her breath steadied, Marisol lay amidst the serene embrace of nature, yearning for the elusive peace she sought.

She laid back on the forest floor, and the rhythmic inhaled and exhaled of her lungs accompanied a sense of freedom she hadn't experienced in a long time. The morning air was sweet and invigorating. It filled her lungs, providing a respite from the tangled threads of her recent nightmares. Sleep begins to creep in on her after a while, tempting her to surrender to its welcoming embrace. Yet, the persistent unease and trauma wouldn't allow it. She wouldn't dare, not when the beast awaited in her subconscious.

Questions swirl in her mind like a tempest. Why were her nightmares intensifying? Was there a connection to Redwood, or was it a mere coincidence? With no answers to her questions, the beast, which was a recurring figure in her dreams, remains an unsettling mystery. She pondered if it could be this same creature whose existence lurked in the shadows of Redwood. Was it a manifestation of the pack's fears, maybe?

Suddenly, the tranquility was disrupted by the sound of approaching footsteps, a twig snapping under the weight of it. Marisol strains her eyes to identify the intruder. Too fatigued to spring into action, Marisol simply listened as the rhythmic footfalls drew nearer until Caleb emerged from the shadows, his presence commanding attention.

"Marisol," he called out to her, prompting Marisol to sit up and meet his gaze.

"What are you doing here?" Caleb's voice held a note of suspicion, prompting Marisol to roll her eyes in response.

"I know you ran out here thinking, 'Ahh, Marisol is on the run again. She's going to try and escape captivity again, possibly bully innocent pack members while at it.' Unfortunately, it's not the case this time, so you can go back to bed or simply find yourself else to do with your life." Marisol replies with a bite to her words.

Caleb, seemingly unmoved by her response, gestures for her to stand up.

"Let's go back." he says, offering to escort her back to the pack house.

Grudgingly, Marisol gets to her feet.

"And, Marisol," he added, gaining her attention once more, "Never venture into the forest alone, especially when it's not so bright outside."

"Why is it so dangerous?" she inquires, her curiosity laced with a touch of skepticism. She remembered him saying something along those lines earlier, too, and hearing them again roused questions immediately.

Caleb hesitates before responding, choosing his words carefully. "There are... things in the forest, Marisol, things you don't understand," he finally answers, his expression holding a weight of hidden truths.

Marisol scoffs at his cryptic response but complies, nevertheless, following Caleb back to the pack house.

As they walked, Marisol stared at his broad back, trailing behind him, found she could no longer contain her frustration. "You know, you're full of secrets. Almost as much as you're full of shit," she notes, her tone a blend of exhaustion and defiance. "What is it with this place? What's the big secret Redwood's hiding?"

Caleb's gaze remains trained ahead as he speaks. "Redwood has its complexities, Marisol. Not everything can be explained in a single conversation," came his answer, maintaining an air of authority.

As they approach the pack house, Marisol is once again left feeling caught in a web of half-truths and concealed realities. "You may be the Alpha here, but that doesn't mean I'll blindly accept everything you say. I mean, look where that's got me." her eyes narrow in determination even as she chuckles humorlessly.

Caleb pauses before the entrance, his demeanor shifting. "You have a right to question, Marisol. In time, you'll understand it all," he states mysteriously before ducking in and disappearing somewhere in the pack house, leaving Marisol standing at the threshold with a swirl of unanswered questions.

The day begins to unfold with an air of suspense, and Marisol believes in the fact that Redwood holds secrets, much more twisted and complex than she might've imagined, each revelation veiled behind layers of intrigue and concealed truths.