

Chapter 134

In the dead of the night, Marisol finds herself wandering through an unfamiliar wing of the packhouse, the corridors dimly lit and lined with old, dusty decorations hanging on the walls. Dust danced in the air, casting eerie shadows on the worn-out walls. The atmosphere was different from the pristine sections of the pack house that she'd slowly begun to grow used to. Intrigued yet unsettled, she ventures deeper into the unexplored territory, guided only by the pale moonlight seeping through a few cracked windows.

As she meanders down the corridor, the soft echoes of growls and whimpers reach her ears. Marisol's heart quickens in its pace, her breath growing labored. The hairs on the back of her neck stood on end, a chilling sensation creeping along her skin. The sounds felt all too familiar, eerily similar to the ones that left her gasping for air and waking up drenched in her own sweat, her heart thudding violently against her chest.

Uncertainty clouded her thoughts, caught between making the sane choice of retreating or the curious one of pressing on. The surrounding air is heavy, the darkness unending. This scene also looked scarily similar to the start of her nightmares, which obviously does not spell good for her.

Suddenly, a strange dizziness washes over her, the surroundings blurring into a disorienting haze. Her vision swirls, causing the passageway to morph into a more confusing labyrinth of shadows and echoes. The growls and whimpers only seem to grow louder too, echoing off the walls like a sinister chorus.

In a disoriented state, Marisol stumbles forward, her steps unsteady and erratic. Her surroundings being a blur was of no help, even as she continued to shake her head with her eyes shut, willing her senses back, but it did not look to be working if anything, she felt herself spiraling into an abyss of confusion. Maybe she was right after all, her nightmares were here once again, taking on a new approach to delivering the scare of her life in the most crafty methods.

But like a flip had been switched, her senses suddenly returned, and she jolted awake, still in her room with the moon casting a silvery glow over the room as it seeped through the window. Cold beads of sweat dotted her forehead, her heart racing at a frenzied rhythm. With a frown, she looked around once again. What the actual hell had just happened? The location of her dream, usually indiscernible, was undoubtedly Redwood this time. Had she sleepwalked through the pack house? Or perhaps this was another trick of the beast in her nightmares, incorporating its existence into the walls and hallways of her new home. It was either that, or she had experienced a vivid nightmare she couldn't discern from reality.

Trepidation lingers in her mind as she struggles to make sense of the inexplicable journey she had undertaken in the dead of night. The mysterious wing of the packhouse, the unearthly sounds that seemed to be coming from somewhere within, and the disorienting haze that'd left her feeling unnerved and unsure.

With a shuddering breath, Marisol buried herself deeper into her covers, seeking whatever safety or comfort it could provide as the remnants of fear and uncertainty continued to cling to her like a haunting melody. As she forces her eyes to close, the unshakable sense of foreboding remains, a constant feeling that leaves her unable to fully relax as she wonders if it really was just a dream or a true revelation of the grim reality lurking within Redwood's depths.

As she wakes up the next morning, Marisol's mind remains tangled with the strange events of the previous night. The uncertainty and growing inability to differentiate between what was real and what was not, even in her waking moments, gnaws at her thoughts, signaling an already sour start of her day.

Her muscles and bones felt worn as if she hadn't gotten a night of sleep in her bed but had run a marathon all through the night instead.

With a heavy sigh, she pushed herself off the bed, trying to shake off the unease that now seemed to flow within her as naturally as her blood would, but the events of the night before were unrelenting, replaying in her mind in an unending loop, the mazziness and confusion still vivid despite the haziness surrounding it.

She pads to the window, gazing out with a forlorn look as she ponders venturing out for a run. It would help clear her mind and there was nothing she craved more than that at the moment, but Caleb's warning chose that exact time to echo in her head, the adamancy of his words compelling her to reconsider.

With another heavy exhale, she decides to remain indoors atleast until dawn, strolling around the room to avoid her own thoughts until the early morning light gradually begins to seep into the room, when she then decides to freshen up. Her muscles still seemed to protest against movement, feeling frail and fatigued. She wondered if she had physically exerted herself far more than she could recall as she made her way to the ensuite.

After taking a refreshing shower, Marisol wraps herself in a fluffy robe before picking out an outfit for the day. She pads down to the kitchen afterward, hoping that a wholesome breakfast would bring some solace to her distressed body and mind. As she steps into the bustling kitchen, the comforting aroma of freshly baked bread and sizzling bacon floods her nostrils, heavy in the air, creating a little wisp of homeliness.

The pack members all went about their tasks, chatting amiably and preparing for the day ahead and, once again, Lily was first to notice her arrival, greeting her with a warm smile.

"Good morning, Marisol! Slept well?" She chirps, her eyes reflecting genuine concern and interest.

Marisol manages a faint smile, genuinely appreciative of her newfound friend, -if that would be the correct term. She shuffles closer before giving a reply, "Not quite. Strange night, you know?"

Lily's brow furrows slightly at that. "Oh? Anything I can do to help?"

Marisol shook her head, trying once again to push the oddity of her experience to the back of her mind to no avail. "No, it's all good. I'll figure it out. I'm sure breakfast would help too. Smells really good, by the way."

Lily chuckles softly and gestures toward the spread of food laid out on the table. "Help yourself. We've got a bit of everything today."

Marisol nods gratefully and wastes no time on beginning dishing out her servings. Despite the warmth of the kitchen and the comforting aroma of food, the feeling that the entirety of the events of the night before might not have been merely a dream, persists.

Finding a seat at the table, Marisol takes the time to scan the room, her gaze briefly meeting those of a few pack members who are quick to avert their eyes. The unspoken exchanges and nods of acknowledgment between themselves do not go unnoticed.

They were certainly the most unwelcoming bunch Marisol ever had the misfortune of encountering, that was for sure. Another thing she knew for sure, was that hidden beneath those subtle exchanges were secrets that she needed to unveil and fast.

She gobbled up her food, deciding she didn't want to be subjected to their judgmental stares any longer than she had to. She returns her plate to the kitchen, almost bumping into Sophia.

She blinks, unsure of how to react, considering this was the first time seeing Sophia since their heated argument the other day. Deciding on no reaction, Marisol hurriedly sidesteps the blank-faced woman and makes to walk away, until...

"Was this pack house renovated recently?" she suddenly asks, stopping at a threshold. Lily, who had been meaning to join her in her walk, suddenly tensed up at the words, looking between Marisol and Sophia, the Luna having also stopped mid-walk.

"Why would you think that?" Sophia asked back, spinning around slowly to look at Marisol.

The sudden change in atmosphere was not lost on Marisol, and gauging their reactions, she decides not to press on it further, especially not with Sophia around, so, she shrugs, keeping her poker face.

"What? Pack houses like these need to be renovated regularly to keep them looking good. Or don't they?"

Sophia, whose brows had furrowed, visibly relaxes, although she quickly schools her expression again. "Yeah right," she murmurs before turning to Lily. "Why don't you answer her, Lily?"

Lily looked obviously nervous, she swallowed hard while Marisol raised her brow, making a show of waiting for an answer.

"Well... uhm... the pack house has been renovated a couple of times before."

Marisol bites back a smile, internally scolding herself for her amusement at Lily's expense. She nods seriously, humming. "So are there any areas that weren't renovated?"

Lily's eyes widen. She opens her mouth to speak, visibly scrambling for an answer which Sophia beats her to.

"No. Why do you care anyway?" there's an undertone of hostility in her tone but Marisol figures that should've been expected. She shrugs again.

"Just curious." and without waiting for an answer, she walked away from the conversation, heading straight to the library. Now she was more certain that her dream might have been an actual sleepwalk.

She could sense the fear in Lily and the lies almost oozing from Sophia's pores. They were hiding something and whatever they were hiding was in that part of the house that hadn't been renovated.

Since they were all hellbent on keeping their secret buried, Marisol grows all the more determined to unearth whatever it was. The library welcomes her with the subtle scent of aged paper and the soft creaking of wooden shelves.

Marisol had fallen in love with it from the moment Lily had shown it to her. She'd spent some time there the first time, but only now did she take the time to really admire it.

It was a vast space filled with towering bookshelves, each crammed with volumes that held the secrets and history of the pack. The polished mahogany tables and plush armchairs provided a cozy atmosphere that invited deep contemplation.

Driven by relentless curiosity, Marisol makes a beeline for the history section. She needed answers, and this seemed like the place where she might find them.

The first order of business was to acquire the layout and maps of the packhouse. She unearthed blueprints detailing the intricate structure, studying each level and room meticulously. The map now lay sprawled across the table, revealing hidden passages and connecting corridors, feeding her insatiable curiosity about the mysterious corners of Redwood.

Next, she delves into historical writings, her nimble fingers dancing over the spines of weathered tomes that chronicled the pack's legacy. Yellowed pages carried stories of triumphs and trials, and old maps depicted the evolution and impressive growth of the territory over the years. Marisol marvels at the rich history woven into the fabric of Redwood, a history that remained elusive to her until now.

Placing the maps and historical records strategically, she disguises her intent by picking up a random book. The decoy becoming her shield, obscures her true pursuits as she immerses herself further into what would be a major stepping stone to her understanding of her new prison.

She begins to study and compare the new pack to the old, gasping as different pieces of information continue to unravel right before her eyes. She finds Caleb and his mate to be much more deceptive than she had thought.

In contrast to his words, Redwood had never been attacked by rogues. Instead, they'd been having issues with the witches at their border. She sees something about an Ember Coven that had wanted to drive the Pack out for centuries. She could tell that there was more to this, but then, the history books seemed just as evasive about it as the people of Redwood.

Another shocking discovery, Caleb was never mentioned as the original Alpha of Redwood. After his parents were brutally killed in an attack, his older brother was supposed to take over, but that looked to be the end of any information on said brother in all the history books. There was also no mention of a prophecy of any kind. In fact, Redwood hated witches more than any werewolf kin in the entire universe, prophecies came from witches, so how could this have happened?

It seemed like whatever was happening in Redwood was a result of a supernatural manipulation, but it still didn't explain why they'd ensnared her. It was at that moment that another realization dawned on her, the fact that there was an fact, a force field, keeping her within the boundaries of Redwood. That had to have been made by a witch too, which would mean that Caleb and his mate, were indeed, working with a witch. It also explained why he'd made the workers in the packhouse swear an oath and kept it away from the rest of the pack.

Yet, the revelation only works to deepen her concern, making her wonder what exactly her part would be in all this. Because after the affliction Redwood had suffered at the hands of the Coven, she didn't think it could happen that Caleb would willingly let a witch manipulate the borders of his pack. The things they were hiding only looked to grow more complex and dangerous the more she looked and that unnerved Marisol.

She begins to study the building plans to figure out how to get back to that place she had seen in her dreams, which felt more like she'd sleepwalked. Just then, she stumbles on a blueprint on the far side of the plans, tucked away, almost torn from having been folded and disregarded for almost as long as the building plans existed. This was a tunnel..... a secret tunnel that led out of Redwood.

She gasped loudly, throwing a hand over her lips to muffle the sound. That was it! That was her way out! She'd finally found her way back home. Elated, she begins to compare her new discovery to the older maps.

The newer maps did not have that tunnel but the older ones did. It seemed as if the new plans and maps erased a lot of things about Redwood.

Now she just needs to... her train of thought is disrupted by the sound of footsteps.

'Caleb!' She thinks and swiftly employs the decoy book to veil the maps and plans scattered across the table. The subtle shuffling of papers and the nonchalant posture she assumes create the illusion of a casual reader engrossed in a novel.

The door creaks open almost immediately and Marisol is not surprised to see Caleb walk in. His eyes ever so suspicious as he takes in the sight Marisol sits admists.

"What are you doing, Marisol? Why the sudden interest in the pack's layout?"

"Morning to you too, Caleb, Alpha of Redwood." She answers, looking up from her book.

Caleb sighs tiredly, running a hand through his hair. "What are you up to this time around, Marisol? You accosted my mate in the kitchen with weird questions too. What is all this about?"

With an air of nonchalance, Marisol chuckles and counters with a question of her own. "I remember asking you that exact same question, Caleb. What is all this about? Why did you bring me here? What's the real reason behind all of this? What do you hope to achieve by keeping me here?"

Ignoring her queries, Caleb huffs "Whatever it is you think you're doing. Stop it. It's not worth it. You'll only get yourself in more trouble."

Marisol bats her lashes, feigning innocence. "Oh come on, why do you always assume that I'm up to no good? I'm just doing a bit of reading. Caleb. You know, exploring the vast knowledge hidden in these books." She gestures at the wide expanse littered with books.

Caleb, still not buying the act, only narrows his eyes. "And your questions about the building renovation plans?" He presses, his curiosity evident.

Marisol met his gaze with a playful twitch of her lips, "Like I said... just curious about how things work around here. It's quite fascinating, you know? Redwood."

"Stop poking around, Marisol. None of the things you're curious about would do you any good. You might get hurt if you keep pushing."

Undeterred, Marisol maintains her composure. "Trouble seems to be a common theme in Redwood. Maybe it's time for some clarity, don't you think?" she retorts, challenging.

Caleb shuts his eyes with an annoyed tick of his jaw. "You're not listening, are you?"

"Neither are you!" Marisol snaps, "You brought me here and refuse to tell me anything. I fought until I lost the strength to, and now I'm just trying to get by, yet here you are, threatening me!"

Caleb pauses, no doubt sensing the anger churning within Marisol. Her wolf was growing irked, and he could feel the dominance rolling out from it. That was new.

Marisol didn't exhibit this type of dominance ever. On the contrary, she'd been pretty much docile except for a few outbursts here and there.

He clamps his lips shut and with no more than a nod, he walks off.