

Chapter 135

Marisol leaves the library armed with two maps and, fueled by the day's success, she decides to try another shot at her exploration of the Redwood Pack, a conscious decision to also steer her focus from thoughts of the haunting place in her dreams.

As she strolls through the pack grounds, a sense of being watched urges her to maintain a facade of calm, at least until she senses the tension has eased. However, a disconcerting scent soon reaches her nostrils, a potent mix of stale blood that no doubt spelled death and suffering. It assaulted her senses, threatening to overwhelm her with every step she took further.

As Marisol walks toward the unpleasant stench, whispers from the pack members reach her ears. Muffled conversations about the escalating situation buzz in the air, still, in her confusion, the palpable distress in their voices does not go unnoticed.

"It's getting worse," she hears one of the voices say, heavy with concern.

"I can't take it anymore; we should leave," another one suggests, expressing a desire to escape the tumult within the area, or could it be the pack as a whole?

"Our homes are ruined, and the attacks never stop. What exactly is the Alpha doing about it?" A third voice adds this time.

The last sentiment strikes Marisol deeply, and empathy swells within her. Redwood was suffering, but how? What was going on?

Upon reaching the source of the disturbing scent, Marisol finds herself standing before an infirmary. On further inspection, a more gruesome scene only looks to unfold before her eyes.

As far as her eyes could see, there was a stream of wounded people, the air carrying their moans and cries of pain as the walls echoed the collective struggle of everyone present therein. The stream of individuals who trooped in and out of the infirmary, bringing more wounded people to be treated, seemed constant too.

Amidst the turmoil, Marisol couldn't help but overhear snippets of dialogue.

"We can't withstand this anymore. The attacks are relentless," a pack member all but cries, exchanging concerned glances with another.

"What is Alpha Caleb waiting for? We need a solution already," someone implores, their frustration echoing the sentiments of many.

Marisol's heart ached for the pack, witnessing the toll of their suffering. Redwood was teetering on the brink of complete chaos, and she grew deeply concerned, only now realizing just how shielded she'd been from their struggles.

As the weight of reality presses upon her, Marisol feels compelled to uncover the truth behind Redwood's suffering. And she was sure that it started with whatever was hiding behind the pristine walls of the pack house.

Later that night, Marisol decides to go searching for the mysterious wing she was sure was a key factor in unraveling the secrets that lay within. However, just as she steps outside her room, Marisol senses the presence of someone. Because whoever it was had cloaked their scent, she couldn't pinpoint who this intruder was.

Knowing this, she stubbornly presses on. Purposely walked out of the pack house in slow steps before taking a long, aimless walk around the pack grounds, wanting to shake off the unwanted guest, but they proved to be just as stubborn, remaining on her trail the whole time, and she figured they had to be a pack member as they seemed to know well enough about the pack to make use of shortcuts and find her again before she could ever celebrate shaking them off.

As a final resort, she turns towards the forest, but before she can make a leap for it, she hears a hushed call of her name, causing her to turn around, wide-eyed.

"Marisol! Are you crazy?" The voice belonged to none other than Sophia.

"What are you doing here?" Sophia continued, her tone laced with suspicion.

Marisol meets her gaze with a raised brow, shoulders squared. "Is it a crime to walk around the pack now?" she retorts haughtily and Sophia scoffs, unimpressed.

"You know exactly what I mean. What's your mission here?"

Marisol sighs heavily, growing tired of the constant scrutiny and suspicion. "I don't have a mission, Sophia. I was just stretching my legs and trying to understand why in the Goddess's name you're following me around."

Sophia's eyes shrunk into even smaller slits, suspicion etched boldly across her features. "Don't play innocent, Marisol, and stop with this crazy act. Why the sudden interest in walking into the forest this late? I'm sure Caleb must've already warned you just how dangerous it could get!"

"What danger?!" She shoots back, "And if anyone here is putting on a 'crazy act', it's you! Can I not even do so much as take a walk? If you'd rather I remain indoors all day, maybe try cuffing me to my bed. I wouldn't put that past you anyway."

The tension simmers beneath their exchange, waiting to boil over.

Sophia scoffed loudly with a roll of her eyes, making it clear she wasn't buying into Marisol's nonchalant demeanor. The two locked eyes, an unspoken rivalry lingering in the air.

"What exactly is your problem with me?" Marisol questions, pushing at the almost visible strings of tension.

"Because you're sly. My wolf hates you because you still carry around the scent of our mate. And you're pulling Caleb in all directions. It's as if he's always at your beck and call."

Marisol snorts at that, she doesn't miss Sophia's brows twitching in annoyance.

"You did that on purpose, didn't you? Making Caleb run to you like he's yours to toss around. You know I know your scent is all over him. You're using that against me." she accused, voice tight, and it was now Marisol's turn to roll her eyes.

"I get it. You're jealous and everything is now my fault. But did you stop to think, even for a moment, that none of this would have been happening if you hadn't tricked me into coming here in the first place?"

"Watch your mouth!" Sophia snaps. "If it were up to me, you wouldn't even be here. But we need you, even if I think it's a terrible idea."

Marisol snickered, "Fine by me, I'm sure you could convince your mate to let me go then."

"Don't get smart with me. Your presence stirs trouble, and I can't stand the fact that we need you. Don't make me do something we'll both regret."

Marisol sighs and shakes her head. "We both agree on one thing, then. This was a bad idea. So let me go!"

Sophia shoots her a venomous look, a frown etched onto her features. "It's too late now. Freedom isn't an option. We will go ahead with the plan. But mark my words- it won't end well for you if you don't keep your distance from my mate."

Marisol raised an eyebrow at the threat, holding back an unamused laughter. "Oh, believe me, I have no interest in your mate, you can keep him. Now, if you're not here to let me in on what exactly this whole thing is about, I'd prefer to be left alone."

With a dismissive scoff, Sophia turns around and leaves, leaving Marisol standing alone under the moonlit sky.

As soon as Sophia completely disappears from sight, Marisol returns to the pack house. It was time to find the hidden wing and most importantly the tunnel that should lead out of Redwood. She was sure that that tunnel couldn't have been affected by whatever spell was keeping her trapped in Redwood. She just had to find it first.

She fishes out the map she'd hidden beneath the layers of her dress. Earlier, she'd constructed her own map that interlapped the old and new structural layout and returned the original to the Library so as not to rouse any further suspicion from the distrustful couple.

She follows the passageways carefully, with full-on hope that it will lead her to the right place.

Despite a series of wrong turns, Marisol's persistence eventually pays off. She found herself in a hallway that looked eerily like it led to the wing she'd sleepwalked into. It was so obscure, that it was obviously being kept hidden. A surge of disbelief and pride fills her as she stands before the entrance, ready to unveil whatever mysteries lay within.

The mysterious wing loomed before Marisol, its atmosphere heavy with secrets and the weight of the unknown.

As she takes a heavy step inside, the atmosphere seems to shift dramatically. The desolation of the place hitting her in waves emphasizes the stark contrast between this hidden wing and the rest of the pack house. The air was thick with an unsettling stillness, and the faint odor of mustiness lingered in the shadows.

She pauses for what was no more than a few seconds, but feels like way more as she listens for another being or the noises she heard the last time. Anxiety creeps into Marisol's mind, but her determination spurs her forward after she'd confirmed that she was alone.

Marisol explores the dimly lit corridors. The dull beam of light from the moon revealed a series of closed doors, hinting at concealed chambers that held secrets she was itching to discover.

Marisol tries to read the map to regain a sense of direction, but the dimming moonlight renders it almost illegible. Marisol, praising her own preparedness, retrieves a small flashlight from her pocket. Its feeble glow provided just enough illumination for her to discern the details of the map.

Bolstered by her determination, she cautiously ventures deeper, mapping her surroundings with the faint light provided by the torchlight.

Dust motes danced in the air as Marisol navigated the labyrinthine corridors, following her map in pursuit of answers she could no longer withstand the ambiguity of.

As she surges forward, her senses heighten in succession, acutely aware that every breath brought her closer to unraveling the enigma shrouded in the secrecy of the pack's hidden wing.

The dim light casts eerie shadows, emphasizing the neglect the wing had endured. Marisol could feel the silence, a spectral stillness broken only by the faint echoes of her footsteps. The oppressive air clinging to her skin, and the musky scent of abandonment permeated the space.

Her focus now shifted to finding the elusive tunnel, a potential means of escape from Redwood. The journey through the darkened corridors felt surreal, and every creak and echo amplified the ominous atmosphere.

Marisol's steps were measured, her taut body aware of every murky breeze that blew past her as she ventured deeper into the unknown.

Then, she stumbled upon a door that stood out from the others. A door that looked less worn than all others, one that looked to beckon her to take a peek within, a promise of mysteries unfolding. Bracing herself, Marisol senses in a breath before gripping tightly on the knob and twisting it to reveal a room unlike any other.

In the heart of the mysterious wing, she finds a hidden chamber filled with ancient artifacts, arcane symbols, and dusty books. It was a clandestine library locked away from prying eyes. The realization hit her and her jaw dropped: this was the heart of Redwood's secrets.

Eager to unravel the hidden truths, Marisol rushes in, wasting no time to begin examining the dusty volumes. Each book seemed to hold the answers to the questions that had plagued her mind since her arrival at Redwood, the answers to questions Caleb and the pack had chosen to keep veiled.

Time passes quickly as Marisol immerses herself in the secrets of the clandestine library, the information she uncovers painting a chilling picture of the Ember Coven, their dark dealings, and the struggles Redwood had faced over the years. It hinted at ancient alliances, the consequences of broken pacts, and the relentless pursuit of power that had thrown the pack into turmoil.

However, the most startling revelation awaited her in the final pages of a worn grimoire. A prophesy foretold a dire future, entwined with the destiny of herself.

It spoke of a great war between Redwood and the Ember Coven, a conflict that would determine the fate of both of them. And at the center of it, all was Marisol—a pawn, a savior, or perhaps something more.

Her heart picks up its pace as the weight of responsibility and the role she would supposedly play in all of it settles upon her shoulders. The secrets she uncovered resonated with the nightmares that haunted her sleep, and the prophesy hinted at a destiny she couldn't escape.

That was when she noticed that the ink immortalizing the prophesy onto paper looked new compared to the rest of it. She pauses, leaning in to smell the ink before feeling it, and that confirms her suspicion.

What exactly was going on?

Determined to unearth the entirety of the prophesy and the pack's history, Marisol pushes further. Little did she know that the answers she sought might unravel not just the mysteries of Redwood, but also her own existence.

Realizing that she'd spent too long skimming through books and had gotten very distracted from her main goal, which was finding the tunnel and finding her way home, she decided to call it quits with the Library for the meantime.

A little light-headed from all the new information, Marisol stumbles out of the library, her mind swirling with the weight of the revelations she'd unearthed. The ominous prophesy and the mysteries of the concealed library had left her in a state of utter bewilderment.

Her fingers tremble as she tries to look at her map again. She cautiously traverses the shadowy corridors of the hidden wing, the air still dense and foreboding, each step echoing a palpable tension. Her heartbeat drums in her ears, a frantic cadence of fear and urgency.

Then, without warning, an immense force collides with her, throwing her clean across the hallway. The impact jarred through her body, sending surges of pain that reverberated through her ribs. A searing pain shoots through her side as she struggles to process the surrounding happenings, her senses reeling.

A menacing growl ricochets through the air and her heart takes a dive as her eyes send a breath-stopping image to her brain. Before her, stood a colossal wolf, towering over her with menacing intent.

Its fur was blood-red and its eyes piercing with a glint of familiarity that sent shivers cold down her spine. A surge of dread seizes her as she recognizes its uncanny resemblance to the beast that plagued her nightmares.

Marisol's heart hammered violently against the confines of her chest, her voice caught in a strangled cry for help. Fear takes her in an icy hold, leaving her rooted in her spot, only to watch helplessly as the wolf advances, its presence an overwhelming threat that loomed over her. The terror of the moment paralyzes her, every fiber of her being screaming for survival.

It huffs loudly, leaning in before it suddenly dips lower, grabs her foot in its mouth, and begins to shake her like a rag doll. Marisol let out piercing screams expecting it to smash her body into the walls of the hallway.

However, she realizes that they are in a large space, the walls a little further away. It tosses her around for a while, growling and grunting. Marisol's life flashes before her eyes. The wolf from her nightmares was as real as it could be, and it was here, with a clear intent to end it all once and for all.

Yet, as abruptly as the attack began, the wolf drops her painfully onto the ground with a loud thud and begins to back away until it disappears completely out of sight, leaving her trembling and gasping for air on the cold, unforgiving floor.

Still reeling from the terrifying experience, Marisol remains unmoving on the floor, grappling with the inexplicable encounter. Her mind raced, trying to comprehend the bewildering resemblance between the wolf that was real and the daunting creature from her nightmares.

Pain pulsed through every single part of her body, she was certain that she had broken a couple of body parts. Marisol struggles to get back on her feet, her body trembling with a mix of shock and adrenaline. She frantically scans her surroundings, aware of the lurking danger, her thoughts a chaotic whirlwind of terror and confusion.

Eventually, she manages to find her footing, her breath coming in ragged gasps as she hurries away from the eerie wing, her mind reeling from the mystifying experience. Was this why they'd asked her to stay put? The danger she'd been warned about? Redwood was home to the daunting creature that plagued her nights.