

## Chapter 140

Cedric lay on the floor, a deep breath escaping his chapped lips at the same time his stomach growls obnoxiously loud. He felt pretty lousy, and that had slowly become the constant, having not remembered feeling normal for a long time. There were gaps in his memories, too, like someone took a hole-punch into them.

He hears another growl after a few minutes and accompanies it with yet another tired sigh. His belly was making a fuss, and it was weird because, instead of craving the raw meat that had been normalized for months now, he now really wanted a nice, home-cooked meal.

After several minutes of quiet contemplation, he pushed himself to sit up in a quest to shake off the dizziness that was only fueled by his hunger, but the sudden movement only looked to cement his disorientation as he fell back down. Cedric had a bunch of questions bouncing around in his head, too. He knew he couldn't go back to the pack because he still was a monster that they all feared, and rightfully so, but he had already gone far too long without food.

He had a solid idea of where he was, but he couldn't figure out how he got there. Or what exactly had happened in any order that made sense?

The only memories that were clear to him were his failed coronation, his parent's death, and the witch, Guinevere.

Another memory that stood out among the huge blur was the anger, hot and fiery and the way it exploded in him, spreading with an impossible speed until it took over all his faculties, leaving him a mindless, blood-hungry beast.

The anger was still lurking somewhere in his subconscious and was gaining energy as his hunger pangs increased. The floor was cold, and the dim light was doing nothing to help his annoyingly dulled senses.

Cedric distractedly thinks about the times when his wolf instincts pushed him to eat raw meat, how that, -albeit in fearsome amounts - had always been enough to satisfy him. He wondered why it suddenly changed and why even the smell of raw meat had now lost every appeal it once held to his nostrils and still protesting stomach. This strange desire for something more..... civilized – a regular meal was even more terrifying than he imagined.

He convinces himself to get up after a while, limbs shaky and body weak from lack of refueling. As he stands, he is reminded of the terrified screams and paled faces that had quickly become all he remembers from whenever he has even the slightest amount of control over his beastly body, before it is quickly snatched away, and his consciousness, trampled into nothingness within it. He had already let this go on for too long. He needed to find food, and the smell in the air hinted that there just might be something to eat nearby.

Taking careful steps, Cedric explored his surroundings, not sure what he would find. He was hungry, yes, but there was also this itch to understand how and why everything was the way they were now.

As Cedric neared the threshold, a memory hit him like a freight train, causing him to freeze in his tracks, his brows furrowing and hairs on his nape raised in alert. It was about the girl – the female wolf who had dared to trespass into his territory multiple times now. She was the only one who had faced him and managed to escape without a scratch, or atleast, not enough damage to still want to come back. The same one he had bizarrely asked for a mirror and a razor, and who, after his hazy attack, had boldly demanded an apology. Strangely, his wolf seemed fixated on her, and he wasn't sure how to feel about that.

He unconsciously takes a sniff at the air and finds slight traces of her scent lingering behind, causing him to growl involuntarily. It was then that he'd decided he was not very pleased with the way his body reacted to the thought of her, yet it felt like only a matter of time before he would crave to reach out to her again.

Stepping back, he settles onto the throne, at the room's center, closing his eyes as if to savor the memory. The recollection of her standing defiantly before him lingered, a moment etched in his mind.

There was an undeniable shift after that first encounter, he noted. Something changed, and she was at the epicenter of it. The memory played like a movie in his mind, each frame revealing the complexities of that encounter.

His heart, never one to take a hint in situations like these, whispered truths he stubbornly tried to deny. He knew what had changed and what was happening, but he rejected the idea. It didn't matter if she was the prettiest thing he'd set his eyes on for so long.

Beasts, he told himself, were untethered – no mates, no souls, no conscience. They roamed the dark, solitary creatures.

Yet, deep down, a conflict raged within him. The inexplicable connection to this female wolf challenges his understanding of his nature. The memories and feelings stirred something he wished to bury.

As he sat on the throne, wrestling with conflicting thoughts, he couldn't shake the feeling that the girl held the key to unraveling the mysteries that haunted him. The journey for answers, entangled with the desire to understand the changes within him, unfolded like a shadowy scroll in the dimly lit room. Cedric was at the crossroads of his beastly instincts and a burgeoning awareness that threatened to crack the facade of his untamed existence.

Cedric sat up abruptly, eyes widening in the realization that the mere thought of her had somehow lessened his gnawing hunger.

Casting a gaze at the darkening skies, he reminds himself of the consequences of neglecting to feed. If he didn't, his now beastly wolf would seize control, unleashing havoc upon the pack. Guilt clawed at him, a suffocating reminder of the havoc he had wrought in the now mostly blank spaces of his memories.

He was taunted by horrid glimpses of his incomplete memories daily. He saw himself ripping open the bodies of werewolves that were once close to him. Werewolves that he respected. Sometimes, it hadn't even been about the hunger, but rather, an unexplainable anger at everything and anything fueling the need to wreak havoc and the beast had always succumbed.

He tried to shake those memories off and focus on what was important. Right then, nothing was more important than the need to feed.

An idea came to mind. Determined to test his bond with the pack, Cedric takes a deep breath and tries to summon his brother, Caleb. Normally, these attempts were met with impenetrable resistance, but this time, much to his own shock, he could sense Caleb. The connection felt palpable, and beneath it, his brother's own shock and fear.

Through the mind link, Cedric conveys his urgent need for a well-cooked meal, emphasizing his hunger. He warned Caleb that if his demands weren't met, more members of the pack would suffer. Caleb, fear evident in his thoughts, reluctantly agreed.

And make sure there's a room ready for me in the hidden castle. Cedric instructs. I want clothes, amenities, everything. I need it all. This place is stinky, I need a change and make it glamorous.

Caleb hesitates at the other side, seemingly still grappling with the fact that his brother had reached out and the realness of it all, but eventually gives in, agreeing to fulfill Cedric's requests.

A smirk spread on Cedric's face at Caleb's fear. It reminded him of how powerful and wicked he'd become.

A question flashed through his head.

Why am I still alive, Caleb? He asked. He might have become powerful, but that didn't mean that he couldn't be put down by the new Alpha.

There was no response, and he pressed on.

Why haven't you taken the opportunity to kill me and assume the alpha role entirely?

Silence lingered still.

"Why haven't you taken over yet?" Cedric demanded, his voice echoing through the mind link.

Caleb's response was delayed, creating a tense pause before he finally replied, tone-heavy, "It's not that simple."

Cedric scoffs at that, "You're a coward, Caleb." He supplies curtly, and with that, he severs the connection just as abruptly as he'd initiated it, leaving Caleb to contemplate the gravity of his brother's words.

As Cedric awaited the arrival of the promised meal, conflicting emotions swirled within him. The thought of the girl lingered, a distraction from the turmoil that enveloped his existence. The bond with the pack, once an unbreakable tie, now strained and frayed, reflected the fractures in Cedric's identity.