

## Chapter 142

Cedric, hungry and bored out of his mind, had been sprawled leisurely on his throne when he sensed Caleb and what would no doubt be a few other people approaching the hidden castle.

He immediately springs to his feet, up and out of the entirety of the hidden castle, finding his way into the woods. Like always, his now beastly wolf was itching for complete dominance over his mind and body, and it should've gotten it like it always had, but it seemed the lingering scent of the mysterious female kept it subdued.

Choosing solitude over potential interaction, Cedric trails deeper into the woods, distancing himself from the pack. Despite being in human form, his mind was unstable, and he knew any sudden encounter or unfamiliar scent could trigger a regression into his monstrous state.

Cedric let his thoughts wander as he roamed the dark forest on foot. He caught himself reminiscing about his childhood and the freedom he once enjoyed.

It felt good to feel human again. In the foggy depths of his mind, he remembered believing that the humanity attached to a werewolf was its greatest weakness.

He hated being weak. Because if he had been strong enough, he would have protected his parents and his pack from Guinevere.

He remembered clearly the terrified and confused screams of the unsuspecting pack members as she suddenly manifested in their midst. How she had held each one of them captive with just a snap of her fingers.

How he'd helplessly watched her transform and rip his parents to shreds while he'd remained rooted in place, disbelief and shock blocking every thought he might have had to take any action.

He finds his jaw locking at the memory, reminded of just how much he hated her, how he loathed that memory. Anger courses through his veins, hot like lava. His fingers balled into fists at his sides. He was going to get his revenge. He needed to.

Just then, his musings were interrupted by the sudden realization that the lingering scent from back then was growing stronger. Without conscious thought, he begins tracking it, following a steady hike until it leads him to the boundary.

Annoyed growls echoed through the air, causing Cedric to pause, a frown forming on his face as he assessed the scene. There, he spotted her – scaling a tree, attempting to leap from one branch to another. His heart skips a beat, captivated by the grace of her movements. He could tell the situation wasn't one meant to be a show of her elegance and poise. It would seem she was fleeing from something, or atleast, trying to. She hadn't noticed a new presence, and Cedric wanted to keep it that way, staying hidden as he watched on, curious about her motives.

She leaps through the air with surprising agility. But an invisible force field repels her, sending her careening back into Redwood territory and crashing into a tree that snapped in two upon impact. The impact of the collision echoes through the woods, accompanied by the grim sound of bones breaking.

Concerned, Cedric finds himself springing forward, ready to rush to her aid. However, she bounced to her feet almost immediately, seemingly unharmed, and quickly finds her way back to confront the invisible barrier.

Cedric tries to bite back a smirk at the unpredictability of the display he'd gotten a first-class seat to. Frustration is etched on her features as she now bangs and hacks at what he figures to be a force field, all to no avail.

Cedric could not tear his eyes away, his intrigue growing. He could sense her anguish, and his wolf yearned to reach out in a quest to ease her pain. Yet, curiosity holds him back.

What exactly was she doing? And what was this mysterious force field? Questions swirl in Cedric's mind as he continues to observe her relentless attempts to break free. When had this forcefield appeared, and why was it now a barrier surrounding the Redwood woods?

He is unable to tell how long he'd been watching until his senses are grated at the arrival of a new presence. He could feel the hostility of this person aimed towards his mate as they drew closer, and a low growl involuntarily escaped his lips.

His wolf was irritated. It was hungry and now ticked off at the fact that its alone time with the captivating lady was being interrupted.

The lady, sensing his growl, darts around with alert, sharp eyes surveying her surroundings with surprise etched across her features. Stepping back from the boundary, she peers curiously in different directions, aware of an unseen threat.

He marvels at her beauty from the new angle but chooses to withdraw further into the shadows. It wasn't the time to reveal himself; his wolf was well on edge now, and he doubted he could control the transformation, especially with the arrival of an unwelcome guest.

"Marisol!" A snarky voice calls out, and the pretty lady spins around to the direction it'd come from, her frown deepening at the sound of that voice.

"Sophia." She spits, equally as dissatisfied at the presence. Well, that makes two of them.

Cedric, hidden from their view, leaned closer as if to not miss a second of the exchange even though his sharp hearing had that well handled.

"What are you doing out here?! Are you trying to get yourself killed?" The woman snaps.

"Isn't that what you want?" Marisol retorts, not missing a beat.

As 'Sophia' reveals herself, Cedric catches the scent of his brother heavy on her. She was Caleb's mate. However, the distinct scent of jealousy and anger directed at Marisol makes Cedric instantly decide he does not like Sophia.

Swallowing another growl, Cedric forces himself to retreat, deeming the situation well handled by Marisol, -if what he'd just witnessed was anything to go by - and opting to return to the hidden castle. The brewing tension and animosity threatened to unleash his wolf, and he knew he couldn't afford a confrontation. If he stayed any longer, he would rip his brother's mate apart for disrespecting his own.

As he walks away, Marisol's name echoes in his head. It felt familiar, triggering a search through his fragmented memories for any hint of the name. The process was like navigating a maze of slippery recollections. He strained against the limitations of his incomplete memory, desperate for clarity.

Images flickered – a blurred face, fleeting moments of connection, but nothing concrete. Marisol's name resonated like a distant echo, leaving Cedric frustrated. The connection remained elusive, a puzzle piece teasingly out of reach. He needed answers, not just about Marisol, but about himself, but even that felt much like an overstretch for his current state of mind.

Time seemed to slip through his fingers like sand, and the answers he sought remained the questions they'd been, much to his dismay. His wolf simmered beneath the surface, stubbornly refusing to let go of the unpleasant exchange that was probably still happening in their absence. Caleb's scent lingered in the air, present in every corner of the packground, a constant reminder of familial bonds.

When Cedric returns to the hidden castle, a tantalizing aroma fills the air, pulling him towards the grand dining hall. The sight that greeted him was magnificent – a lavish spread of various meaty delicacies adorned the table, tempting him with an array of flavors.

There were succulent roasted meats, each seasoned to perfection. Juicy cuts of grilled steak, seared to a mouthwatering medium rare, beckoned with their rich aroma. Fragrant herbs and spices infused the air, enhancing the experience. Roasted chicken, its skin crispy and golden, promised a tender and savory delight with each bite.

Besides the meats, a selection of sides awaited – from creamy mashed potatoes to roasted vegetables, offering a balance of textures and flavors. The aroma of garlic and herbs mingled with the meats, creating an enticing symphony of scents.

Cedric wastes no time and dives in hungrily, savoring every bite with gusto. The flavors exploded on his palate, a feast that seemed to rejuvenate him from within. He relished the diversity of meats, the perfect blend of spices, and the tender juiciness that each dish offered.

As he devoured the last morsel, a sense of satisfaction washed over him. It was then that he noticed the transformation in the castle – it had been spotless. The once desolate and dimly lit corridors now sparkled with newfound vitality.

Following the fresh scent of soap and freshly laundered linen, Cedric discovers the room that had been prepared for him. The clothes, neatly lined up, awaited his presence. It had been a long time since he'd felt the warmth of water on his skin or the smoothness of a clean shave.

For the first time in what felt like an eternity, he indulged in a bath. The water was warm and soothing, washing away the grime and weariness that clung to him. The scent of a subtly fragrant soap envelops him, a stark contrast to the wildness that had defined his existence.

After the bath, he stands before the newly wiped mirror, a razor in his hand. With precise strokes, he shaves off the excess hair that had grown untamed during his time in wolf form. As the last strand falls away, Cedric gazes at his reflection with a forlorn look, a transformation both physical and symbolic.

Clean-shaven and fresh out of an hour-long shower, he feels a sense of renewal. The once chaotic castle, too, had its own very invigorating share of transformation, now holding a glimmer of order, and Cedric, in his newfound cleanliness, embraced a semblance of humanity that had eluded him for far too long. The combination of a hearty meal, a cleansing bath, and a sharp razor had not only rejuvenated his body but also kindled a spark of hope within his troubled soul.

Cedric's newfound state of order crumbles almost immediately. As soon as there was nothing left to do, he could only think of Marisol.

She was quickly becoming an obsessive constant in his memory, infiltrating his thoughts and senses. His wolf refuses to be subdued whenever she becomes the object of their thoughts. It was clear how much it wanted her, still drooling at the memories of her scent and wanting to soak in them even more, should the chance provide itself.

That night, sleep eluded Cedric, even though it wasn't much of a surprise, Marisol invading his every thought, appearing behind his closed lids and melding into whatever idle thought he struggled to form. He finds himself imagining the sounds of her laughter, -a sound he hadn't been graced with just yet-, the warmth of her niceties, and damning of them all, he envisions the sound of her saying his name. It was an intoxicating madness that seized his mind, and he fought a losing battle against the surge of emotions.

As swift seconds ticked away, Cedric's control wavered, and what could only be described as an agonizing metamorphosis grips violently at him. A pained groan escapes his lips as his body begins to twist and contort against his will, reshaping into the monstrous form he had tried so hard to escape. The agony of the process was visceral – bones shifting, muscles convulsing, fur sprouting. The pain, both physical and emotional, tears through him without remorse.

In the depths of the transformation, his wolf emerges, wild and angry. It howls loudly, frustration pulsing heavy within its veins, its wild desire for Marisol consuming every inch of its being. Cedric finds himself flailing like a piece of paper caught in a tornado, a unit of his own wolf form, but not quite, as the untamed beast bounds through the pack with a mission, a primal instinct driving him to seek her out.

This was no ordinary hunt; instead of instilling terror and wreaking havoc within the pack like it had been designed to, Cedric's wolf, under the influence of Marisol's allure, hunted with a fervent determination to find her, yearning to be in close proximity to the one who dominated his every thought.

It made it to the pack's borders, the location that held the final memories of a meeting with Marisol, making a few rounds through the lengths of it a number of times, hoping to catch a trace of her scent, anything that could serve as a lead to finding her, but it all proved useless. The relentless search continued through the night.

When the moon hung high in the sky, his wolf, impassioned and disheartened, howled in pain and anguish, calling out to her wolf. It howls for long minutes, and the lack of a response fueled its ire, pushing it into a frenzy. Anything and anyone that crossed its path would now be a target for its unchecked aggression.

By dawn, Cedric returns to the hidden castle, downcast and dejected, only to find his body shifting once again to its human form. He wondered if this was going to become the new norm if he would be pushed to regain his human form, a semblance of sanity, before insanity and complete detachment from humanity took over again. The remnants of the night's chaos weighed heavily on him. The weakness he felt, the loss of control, fueled his frustration. He despised the hold Marisol seemed to have over him, a force he struggled to comprehend.

The morning light revealed the aftermath of the night's turmoil. Cedric surveyed the damage – broken surroundings, wounded pack members, and the lingering scent of chaos. He grapples with the consequences of his unbridled transformation, regret, and guilt weighing heavily on his shoulders now that he is in a state to feel human emotions on a broader spectrum.

Cedric hated the vulnerability he felt, despising the growing influence Marisol seemed to exert over him. Frustration and self-loathing permeated Cedric's thoughts. He wondered if it would continue to go on like this and for how long. The way she infiltrated his every thought and the relentless pull that his wolf felt toward her were proving to be even greater weaknesses than he could've imagined. Determined to resist this inexplicable connection, Cedric chose a different path – hatred.

In the cold light of the day, he convinced himself that he hated her. The very idea of being vulnerable to someone, especially Marisol, repulsed him. He resented the weakness she seemed to unearth within him.

In the reflective surface of the mirror, he meets his own gaze – haunted eyes staring back at him. The internal battle rages on, torn between the human Cedric, who yearns for control, and the beastly wolf seduced by the call of Marisol.

Yet deep down, he knew he owed her a lot. If not for her, he would have remained in his wolf form with little or no cognizance of what he had done.

Instead of wallowing, he decided to go in pursuit of a way out of the mess he was in. He needed something poignant to distract his thoughts from Marisol.

So far, there has been only one other person who caused such a distraction. Guinevere.

He hated the filthy witch that ruined his life. He hated her more than anything. Just maybe concentrating on his hatred for her would give his wolf something else to think about.

They needed a plan. A plan to pay her back in her own coin. All day, Cedric ponders over it, seeking to create a plan. However, every other night, his wolf took over and went in search of Marisol.