

## Chapter 143

Marisol's days had become a monotonous cycle of solitude and brooding, but today was going to mark a departure from her self-imposed confinement. She felt a weariness settling in, a realization that her plans to escape Redwood were going to be all for naught. With a heavy heart, she decided to step outside, seeking a respite from the oppressive thoughts that haunted her. Maybe a little air would help pull her from the depressive state her situation had forced her into.

Surprisingly, Marisol finds herself heading to the kitchen, where Lily welcomes her with a warm smile. The familiar aroma of food being prepared envelopes Marisol as soon as she steps in.

"Marisol! What a pleasant surprise. It's good to see you up and about. What brings you to the kitchen?" Lily inquires, her eyes reflecting a genuine curiosity and warmth.

"I just needed a change, Lily. Mind if I help with something?" Marisol answers with a shrug, making Lily giggle lightheartedly.

"Of course. You're always welcome here, you should know that by now." She muses, letting Marisol step closer before gesturing at the countertop, "How about you chop up these vegetables while I prepare the main course?" Marisol nods immediately, taking her place next to the other.

As they worked side by side, Marisol's mind slowly began to ease. The rhythmic chopping, the clinking of utensils and the sizzle of ingredients filled the air, creating a lighter atmosphere, one she found she could breathe better in.

"So, what's been going on?" Lily hums conversationally, breaking the silence after a few minutes of them silently falling into their roles, curiosity evident in her voice.

Marisol hesitated, unsure of how much she could share. "Just .....trying to find my place here, you know? It's not been easy." She resorts to saying, unconsciously sighing after her words.

Lily nods understandingly. "Redwood can be a challenge, but it's not all bad. There's a sense of family here, and now you're a part of it too."

Marisol could not help but scoff at those words, "Please don't patronize me. We both know that I don't belong here. And try as I may, I will never fit in."

"How can you be sure though? You've been too busy running to even try." Lily counters head-on, making Marisol roll her eyes.

"Oh please," She deadpans, "Just the other day, I was accused of trying to steal your Alpha from his mate just because I wanted to get some air outside. The women here hate me, and they're not even trying to hide it, and the men.... well, they haven't exactly been the most welcoming too." Marisol supplies, already growing irritated at the thought of the very rude interaction with the gossip under the tree.

A small chuckle escapes Lily's lips, clearly not convinced, "Oh don't be like that, Marisol. You only met a few people, don't generalize us all based on that and don't worry, I'll introduce you to a bunch of new people that I'm sure will be nice to you." she finishes cheerily and Marisol sighs, unsure, but just wanting to drop the conversation, at least for now.

"If you say so."

She didn't believe for a second that the 'bunch of new people' would be nice in any way. But it wouldn't hurt to try, and it wasn't like she had anything better to do with all the time she now suddenly has anyways.

As they continue to work, falling back into a comfortable silence, Marisol overhears snippets of conversations from others in the pack. The mention of Cedric's wolf immediately grips her attention, and she can't help but consciously try to lean closer, eavesdropping on the unfolding drama.

"I heard Cedric's wolf made it out again," one pack member remarks, a tone laced with concern as the collective air of despair surrounding the table grows even heavier.

"It's been like that for a few nights now, searching for something it never seems to find. And when it doesn't, it goes back to being destructive and attacking everything in sight." another person adds, eyes raking all over the table, and there's a beat of silence, until-

"Have you heard, Lily?" one pack member suddenly regards Lily, who nods as if having expected to be abruptly pulled into the conversation.

"Indeed, I have. This is new and somehow even scarier than normal," she notes, her expression growing solemn and hums of agreement were heard around the table.

Marisol pauses, her interest piqued. She shakes her head afterward, trying to go back to her work and push aside thoughts of the infuriating man from the hidden castle, but the mention of his wolf's nightly escapades intrigues her, forcing her to voice her question.

"Searching for something?"

"Yes, dear. It's been quite restless lately. No one knows what it's looking for, but it seems determined to find it." Lily explains, casting a concerned glance in Marisol's direction, and Marisol, for lack of a better reaction, offers a small noise of understanding before returning her focus to her work.

Marisol finishes her kitchen duties, the revelation about Cedric's wolf lingering in her mind. Once she was done, she decided to take a walk, that had been her initial mission until she'd gotten carried away in the kitchen, but she wasn't complaining, seeing as keeping herself busy did help force the wheels in her head to a halt to an extent.

As she strolled, Marisol found that she couldn't shake her curiosity about Cedric's wolf. Annoying as he was, the mystery surrounding the wolf's nightly quests intrigued her. The cool breeze rustled the leaves overhead, providing a soothing backdrop to her contemplation.

Just then, she catches sight of Sophia. Swallowing back an annoyed sigh and deciding she was not in the mood for another fruitless back and forth, Marisol considered backing away and steering clear of the ill-tempered woman's path, but it'd been too late.

Sophia, who appeared to be hastily making her way from the infirmary, locks eyes with Marisol. The disdain in Sophia's gaze was unmistakable.

"You," She spits out, her voice dripping with accusation.

Marisol finally grunts this time, a small 'ugh' sound following the roll of her eyes. "Can we skip the theatrics, Sophia? I've got better things to do."

"And do I look like I'm just hanging around doing nothing? Hello, I am the Luna of this pack. Do you know how busy I am? Just now I had to rush to the infirmary to help around, taking care of the people who were injured from last night's attack and next, I have a meeting with some female leaders. I still have to set an example for the young ones. Does that in any way give you the idea that I've just been lazying around?"

"Being Luna is such a tasking work" Sophia rants, her voice carrying a mix of resentment and exhaustion. "I was never supposed to be in this position. I was forced into it, and it's ruining everything."

Marisol, uninterested in Sophia's troubles, feels her lips draw into a thin unimpressed line. She wondered what part of her demeanor or their earlier interactions had given Sophia the impression that she would be willing to listen to her sulk and whine about her perfect life.

'What exactly does this have to do with me?' She thinks to herself.

Sophia, fueled by her discontent and seemingly not noting Marisol's complete detachment from the one-sided conversation, continues her tirade. "And you! This is all your fault. Everything went downhill when you triggered Cedric's wolf. Now its rampage is out of control."

Marisol stands there dumbfounded, struggling to find words amidst Sophia's accusations. Of course, the irritable woman would find a way to rope her into this and the absurdity of the blame placed on her shoulders leaves her momentarily speechless.

"Why do you always blame me for everything?" she asks, her arms crossed in front of her.

Sophia looks a few seconds away from pulling her hair off its roots. "Stop with the self-righteous act. The earlier you come to terms with reality and the fact that you are single-handedly responsible for everything happening here, the better. While you were snooping around, I'm sure you must have seen the prophecy and how you're tied to all this. So stop pretending and get to work!"

Marisol blinks in disbelief, Sophia waits for a response, but on not getting one, and seemingly done with her raving, she shoots Marisol a disdainful glare and storms off, leaving Marisol bewildered by the sudden confrontation. The weight of Sophia's words lingers in the night air, joining the long train of thoughts echoing in Marisol's head.

As Sophia's footsteps fade, Marisol shakes off the shock and resumes her walk, the accusations and blame sitting heavy on her chest and creating a cloud of uncertainty above her head. She couldn't comprehend how her actions could be held responsible for the chaos that seemed to engulf Redwood. Sophia's words made it look like things weren't already bad before Marisol was forced to remain here against her will.