

Chapter 147

The next few days breezed past like the wind and Marisol would like to describe them as uneventful, but she knew it was far from that. As much as she hated to admit it, Marisol and Cedric had developed some sort of arrangement. They would spend their nights together in the throne room, with Marisol convincing herself that it was just so she could keep an eye on Cedric's wolf, but it slowly became more than that.

One day, instead of waking up in the throne room with Cedric's wolf curled around her as usual, she finds herself in what she guessed was his room.

She wasn't able to detangle herself and slip away from his massive weight like she normally would, because it had curled around her so meticulously this time, that there was no way she would move without stirring the large creature.

Huffing angrily after a couple of failed trials, Marisol drifts back to sleep. When she wakes up this time, neither Cedric nor his wolf is anywhere in sight, nowhere to be seen, but she finds that clothes and breakfast have already been set out for her.

Surprised, and with a nagging suspicion taking root within her, Marisol makes her way towards the food and outfit. As she takes in the very lavish sight, she can't help feeling that something is amiss but is unable to place what it is. Her wolf, on the other hand, all but jumps in excitement, swooning at the thoughtful and kind gesture.

The fabric of the new clothes rustles with her quick movement as she hurriedly gets dressed with a knot settled deep in her stomach. A sense of premonition looms over her like a dark cloud as she takes a seat on the table, anxiety brewing within her with every bite that she forces down her throat, tight with apprehension.

She ends up pushing her plate away, half-eaten, gathering what courage she can muster and begins the stride to the door, determination warring with dread in her heart. Just as her hand hovers just above the doorknob, a low growl echoes from behind Marisol. Frozen in place, her breath is caught in her throat as she turns around ever so slowly to find Cedric's wolf standing before her, his massive form towering over her.

Her heart jumps at the sight, sending terrified shivers down her spine as memories of their past encounters flood her mind. It was just as huge and menacing as she remembers and, at that very moment, it felt as though she'd been transported back into one of her many horrifying nightmares. Fear grips Marisol, it's cold, unforgiving claws breaking through her skin and filling every single cell of her body with alarm and a sense of impending doom.

Its eyes glint with a primal intensity, the weight of his gaze almost taking a physical form and weighing down on Marisol. Every single alarm bell in her head goes off at the same time, screaming at her to flee from the danger his presence represented, but Marisol finds herself rooted in place, her breath coming out in shaky puffs and her heart pounding violently against the confines of her chest.

Time seems to come to a standstill as the wolf only stares her down and Marisol holds its gaze, locked in a silent battle of wills. Until, suddenly and without warning, it finally makes a lunge for her. A scream ripped out of Marisol's throat, and she instinctively fell into a crouch, bracing herself for the weight and pain of the impact that was sure to follow, except it never came.

Instead of the sharp sting of teeth breaking into her skin, or whatever form of torture Marisol might've imagined, what she felt was the warm wetness of what was no doubt a tongue, tentative at first, but as she dropped her hands in surprise, the wolf went at it again, until it was licking over her face enthusiastically and with no timed intervals.

Still completely thrown off by the action, Marisol nervously peeled an eye open and there was Cedric's monstrous wolf, crouching into what could only be seen as a playful bow before it made another small jump at her and resumed licking at her face, it's tail wagging eagerly, almost bringing its entire lower body with it as it swings wildly, pausing now at random intervals as if to gauge her reaction.

There's a beat of silence where Marisol struggles to make sense of it all, and then, despite herself, Marisol bursts into an uncontrolled laughter, the sound holding a mixture of her relief and amazement at the completely unexpected turn of events as it spills out into the room like a joyous symphony. She laughs until she starts to gasp for breath, tears of mirth staining her cheeks.

Eventually, the laughter subsides and Cedric's wolf looks visibly calmer beside her, albeit panting heavily with a mischievous glint in its eyes. She remains on the floor for a moment longer, reveling in the newfound sense of peace that envelopes her like a warm embrace.

Collecting herself enough to remember the task at hand, Marisol had to get to her feet again, only for the wretched wolf to throw its weight over her, sending Marisol back to the floor with a small oof. She wrinkles her nose at it, patting its matted fur as she says, "Is this your way of telling me not to go?"

It makes a sound that sounds like a mixture of a snort and a whine, so, with a heavy sigh, Marisol lets herself remain trapped for a while longer. When she finally rises to her feet, Cedric's wolf springs to its feet too, alert and following her every move, with its eyes shining with an almost childlike curiosity.

If it were not for the terrible state of his appearance, she might have found that adorable. With a small smile stretching into her features at the thought, she leads them back into the hidden castle, their footsteps echoing softly in the empty corridors.

"So you don't want me to leave, huh?" She asks, walking into the throne room with the wolf following closely.

It snorts loudly in response and Marisol bends into a squat before making herself comfortable on the floor, the wolf immediately curling at her feet.

"So what do we do in here all day?" She asked conversationally, looking at the wolf for an answer when she was met with silence only to find it biting at its skin uncomfortably, struggling to scratch an itch.

She gives it a concerned look and just then, an idea pops into Marisol's mind. She gets back to her feet and the wolf is quick to follow, seemingly determined not to let her out of its sight.

She wanders around the entire castle until she finds a box holding medical supplies, and she also finds some grooming supplies. With the items in her possession, Marisol leads them back into the throne room, the presence of the large wolf behind her still just a little bit unnerving.

Returning to the familiar space, Marisol gets to work on tending to the wolf's mangled fur, the once menacing red wolf reduced to a docile heap at her side. With gentle hands and soothing words, Marisol worked diligently to clean and treat its wounds, the wolf planted and nuzzling affectionately against her side while she did. It turned out to be a little more difficult than she'd expected, maneuvering the wolf into its preferred position and staying within reach lest it got fussy.

Treating and grooming the large wolf ends up taking the whole day and by the time Marisol realizes it, the sun has dipped below the horizon and the shadows have lengthened. There were still some parts she hadn't gotten to yet, but she was impressed with the progress made, giving her work a nod of approval.

She had managed to dislodge most, if not all, of the tiny weapons and dirt lodged in its fur and treated most of the wounds. As she worked, she'd find herself wondering how exactly he could shift into his human form with all those weapons wedged into his skin. She wonders if they were still present even if he was in human form or if they just disappeared and reappeared, depending on what form he was in.

She also wondered about his wounds. For a wolf so large, he seemed to be totally lacking any healing magic if the many still-fresh flesh wounds were anything to go by. Something told her it had to do with the curse.

Fatigue seeps into her muscles, a yawn leaving her lips as she pushes to her feet and stretches wildly. Done for now, she tries to clean up the mess they'd made of the throne room, but Cedric's wolf follows again, nudging her stubbornly until she gives up.

Earning her attention, it walks to the doors leading out of the throne room and, understanding its actions, Marisol follows. This time around, it brought them to the dining hall, where she found that dinner had been laid out. After eating, they returned to the throne room to find it completely clean.

Marisol gapes at that, her lips opening and shutting like a fish out of water. She had a lot of questions, but she figured Cedric would be in a better place to answer them, although she really doubted she'd be seeing him again anytime soon. It was obvious that his wolf had taken complete control again, but it was a good thing that she was around, at least this way, it wouldn't be out wrecking havoc and harming people.

That night, Marisol drifted off to sleep, lulled by the gentle rhythm of Cedric's wolf's surprisingly soft breathing.

And so, it becomes a sort of routine. Day in and out, Marisol stayed in the hidden castle only, slipping out when she felt that Cedric's wolf was about to give way to his human form.

Despite her previous restrictions, she quickly grew accustomed to this way of life. Her visits to the castle become more frequent as she finds herself enjoying the company of Cedric's wolf, seeking solace in the gentleness of its actions. Despite the looming presence of Cedric himself, she found herself drawn to the creature, her heart aching with empathy for its suffering.

Each day, Marisol tended to the wolf, easing its pain with gentle strokes and soothing words that it seemed to enjoy too. She had taken it upon herself to keep its fur spotless. In so doing, she found herself developing a sense of kinship with Cedric's wolf, but it stopped there.

Each time, she tried to block out the nudges from her senses that reminded her that Cedric and she were fated to become one. She fought with herself and even her wolf. All she wanted to do was help, offer the hand this poor suffering creature obviously needed, and when she was done she was going to return to her family.

That is why she made sure that whenever Cedric was nearing the brink of transformation, she would quietly slip away. Their connection was easier to ignore when he was in wolf form. But when he returned to his human state, the tension between them was too palpable to ignore. She knew that her attraction to him was a dangerous game, one that threatened to consume her if she lingered too long in his presence.

And yet, despite the barriers Marisol herself had wedged between them, the pull she felt towards Cedric remained, brewing and threatening to boil over with every other second in his presence. His presence loomed over her like a shadow, his apparent disapproval of her, a heavy weight that hung in the air between them. She could sense his disdain. It was a silent reminder of the divide that separated them.

Like now, as she moved through the castle, Marisol couldn't shake the feeling of unease that settled in the pit of her stomach. The walls seemed to whisper secrets, their ancient stones bearing witness to the turmoil that plagued the pack.

Just as Marisol is about to slip into the pack house, she is met with the unmistakable sight of Caleb and Sophia, blocking her path, their expressions tense and expectant.

It was clear that they had been waiting for her, judging by the impatient tapping of Sophia's foot and Caleb's own pinched brows. Marisol raised a curious brow, wondering what could have prompted their sudden interest in her. After all, she had come and gone from the hidden castle countless times without any interference from them.

"What's up?" Marisol asked casually when their silence stretched on a little too long for her liking.

Sophia rolls her eyes almost immediately, clearly annoyed by Marisol's nonchalant demeanor. "Have you finally figured out your role in the prophecy?" she spits out, her voice dripping with disdain.

Marisol frowned, a scoff leaving her lips at the question and attitude, resisting the urge to roll her eyes back at Sophia. She makes a move to walk away, but Caleb steps forward, blocking her path.

"What did you do to keep Cedric at bay?" Caleb's voice is firm, his eyes piercing as he studied Marisol intently.

Marisol shrugs nonchalantly, unwilling to divulge the true nature of her relationship with Cedric. The last thing she wanted was for anyone to even get wind of the fact that they were destined mates.

They were already bound by a prophecy neither of them fully understood and revealing a further entanglement would only worsen the case. That would be no help to Marisol. She had to leave Redwood no matter what.

"Why are you being secretive? Tell us! What did you do to him? You've been spending too much time in there, are you trying to tell us that nothing happened?!" Sophia finally snaps, her frustration boiling over.

Marisol remains tight-lipped, her own irritation growing, but Sophia refuses to back down.

"It's our right to know. We are Alpha and Luna. We deserve to know everything that happens here!" She was screaming at this point.

Annoyed, Marisol glares at them both. "Stop bothering me and ask Cedric yourselves. I'm not a pack member, remember?" she retorts, her voice tinged with irritation and with that, she made to walk out of their presence again.

In a sudden burst of anger, Sophia grabs Marisol's arm, yanking her towards her with a force that makes Marisol stumble, a startled yelp leaves her lips and that is when a low growl echoes through the space, freezing everyone in place.

Marisol's heart skipped a beat as her eyes widened in recognition of the sound, a cold breeze sweeping past the stiff figures as Cedric emerged from the shadows, his presence commanding and intimidating.

He moves towards Marisol in slow menacing strides, his eyes fixed on the point where Sophia still holds onto Marisol and snatches her arm away so swiftly that it causes Sophia to stumble, Marisol herself almost losing her footing with the force of his pull, his eyes blazing with fury as he addresses her, "The day you lay your hands on her again will be your last day alive, and you can mark my words on that." The air crackles with tension as his words are delivered in a growl, low and dangerous, sending a shiver down everyone's spine.

Marisol felt her heart flutter in her chest, her body responding instinctively to Cedric's proximity. All she could think about was the way he had pulled her into his chest, his warmth enveloping her like a protective shield and his touch sending jolts of electricity through her body. She couldn't help but revel in the warmth of his embrace.

"Now get out."

Without another word, Caleb and Sophia scampered away, blindly seeking for the other's hands as they did.

Marisol watches them leave in hurried steps, laughter bubbling in her chest. Just then, she realizes that they are now alone. She looks up to find his eyes already on her, sending another tingle down her spine that lingers on her skin, and just like that, she finds herself missing his warmth as Cedric steps away with a dismissive grunt, not uttering another word as he begins to walk in the direction of the hidden castle.

Marisol remained rooted in place, her thoughts still muddled with images of the way Cedric had just looked at her, his eyes filled with a fire that ignited something deep within her soul.

"Are you coming or waiting for another round of bullying?" His gruff voice calls, piercing through her haze, and Marisol finds herself moving before she can think any differently, following Cedric back into the hidden castle against her better thinking.