

Chapter 148

Looking back at it now, Cedric finds that he had no idea what had come over him that led him to interfere and stand up for her. All he knew was that he'd been overcome with a very violent anger, infuriated at the fact that Caleb's mate had been talking down to her.

But why? Why had he felt the need to stand up for her, especially in such a forceful manner? After all, he had been consciously trying to keep his distance, to maintain the facade of the feral beast he had been made to become and eventually had begun to believe himself to be.

Besides, she was an Alpha wolf, her dominance was second only to his in the whole of the pack and probably even beyond, and something told him that if they weren't mates, her dominance might have even been greater than his. So why was it that she'd let herself be blatantly disrespected by a common wolf?

Could it be that she was trying to keep her true form hidden? And if so, why? What would it change for them to know that she was way more than she was letting on? The more he thought about it, the more irritated he became. And this time it wasn't anger fueled by his wolf's emotions, no, he was furious, and even his wolf was a bit surprised and quiet, grating on his nerves even more.

He could feel her footsteps behind him, threading featherlight, almost like she was afraid of provoking his anger.

Afraid? He rages internally at his own thoughts. Couldn't she see that he couldn't for the life of him harm a hair on her head? She was like a leash, an anchor that kept him stable, and yet she was still afraid?

He bounds into the throne room and collapses on the throne, his anger seemingly only tripling with each passing second.

"Why the hell would you let them speak to you like that?" He growls as soon as she steps foot into the room, watching as she freezes, slowly lifts her head to look at him and blinks.

"Are you deaf?" He barked when another second passes without a response.

A scowl mars her expression as she finally resumes walking, finding her way to one of the chairs in the room and sitting.

"You're an Alpha wolf, aren't you?" Cedric badgers on, his eyes narrowing as he studies her intently, "I can feel it. I can feel the threads of your being and I know you aren't any ordinary Alpha either, so why do you behave like some omega?"

As the last word leaves his lips, a growl ripples through the room and Marisol glares at him from where she is sitting. For the first time since he's shifted back to his human form, Cedric felt the corner of his lips lift with a hint of amusement.

"Oh?" He lifts a brow, "You hate that I addressed you as an omega?"

Even from a distance, he could see the way the veins decorating her neck grew engorged with blood, her fingers balling into fists as she struggled to rein her anger in.

Beautiful.

"But I'm not wrong, am I? Right now you're no different from an omega." He adds, gesturing dismissively at her.

"Do not refer to me as that. Don't ever." She warns, her chest beginning to rise and fall at scattered intervals.

Cedric chuckles, taking a small whiff of the air that has now grown heavy with the scent of her dominance. His mate is a wonder. He wanted more, he wanted to see more of what she could do, how far he could go before she really, truly snapped.

"Don't what?" He questions lazily, eyes lifting boredly to lock into her fiery ones as he adds, "Call you Omega?"

The reaction is swift as she springs to her feet, her anger palpable as she repeats in a growl, "I said, do not refer to me as that."

A laughter bubbles out of Cedric's throat and even as he laughs, he keeps his eyes open and on her, not wanting to miss a second of her outburst. He doesn't know whether to describe her disposition as cute or sexy. But he found it entertaining.

"Now, don't you think you're being a little discriminatory?" he drawls, a shrug following his words as he feigns innocence, "I mean..... What's so bad about being an omega? You are acting like one right now and one would think you'd react differently to being called one."

"Cedric." It was a warning, a very clear one, with every letter of his name laced with hints of her annoyance and irritation.

He could feel her restraint slipping. Yes. That was exactly what he wanted. He did not know when it started he'd grown quite curious about her. His fragmented memories presented the puzzles of a previous encounter, that much he knew, but what confused him the most was how it came to be that he appeared in the pack at such a time.

Her name also rang bells in his head, something he still couldn't place a finger on, but it was along the lines of power and magic. The woman in front of him was no ordinary wolf and Cedric was more sure of that than he'd been of anything in his entire life.

Finally, after a beat of silence, Cedric lets his lips curl up into a wide grin as he answers with a tilt of his head, "Yes, Omega?"

"I told you to stop." The last of her words were a different note to her voice, providing the signs of her wolf threatening to breach the surface.

Cedric wanted to prod even more, but he resorted to raising his hands in surrender, sarcasm dripping from his voice as he said, "Okay, okay, calm down, Alpha wolf."

"Don't call me that either."

He raises a brow as he mentally wrestles back the smile that threatens to stretch onto his face. He was having too much fun with this and to keep it so, he had to control his facial expressions.

With an inquisitive loll of his head, he asks, "Really? Isn't that what you are?"

Marisol seems to have had enough at this point, and she's quick to jump at his words, "It's what you are too, and yet here you are, shut away like some degenerate." She spits back and Cedric almost chokes, covering it up with a snort instead.

Looks like the fun's over. She sure knows how to hit a sore spot. With the tables turned, Cedric opts to quickly change the subject, "You're hungry. Let's eat." He says, getting to his feet.

"What if I say no?" She counters, her tone impassive.

He pins her with a stare, not in the mood to deal with an attitude. "Save that attitude for my brother and his mate. You're in my territory now, and you will do as I say."

She rolls her eyes at that but follows after him. As they made their way to the dining hall, Cedric mentally debated asking why she hurried away that morning, ending with a decision to keep his questions to himself. He wanted nothing from her, other than her ability to keep him sane and humane.

The last thing he would want would be to create a bond between them because Cedric knew he couldn't afford to have anybody get close to him. He was a savage, accursed and not able to crave any human contact, and it was going to remain like that forever. He didn't need anybody, not even a mate.

Grudgingly, Cedric leads Marisol to the dining area, where lunch has been meticulously set out. As they approached the table, Marisol's stomach let out an audible growl, betraying her hunger. Cedric swallows back a smile and a smart comment at the sound of it.

It was always amusing to witness such raw hunger and unabashed desire for sustenance from her. It reminded him that he wasn't the only one with primal desires. They were all beasts.

As they take their seats, Marisol wastes no time in digging into the food before her, her movements swift and efficient as she loads her plate with an assortment of dishes, Cedric watching in silence, his gaze lingering on her with a mixture of curiosity and fascination.

He had questions, so many questions that begged to be asked. Questions about her past, her connection to him, the strange bond that seemed to tether them together, more importantly, how she found herself here and why she remained. He also wanted to know who exactly she was and where she was from. But he knew he shouldn't indulge in conversation with her, shouldn't let himself become entangled in her web.

So instead of speaking, Cedric remains silent, content to simply observe as Marisol eats. He finds himself entranced, watching with barely concealed amusement as she practically devours her food, her movements determined, yet graceful. She was so immersed in the need to sate her hunger that it wouldn't be too far-fetched to say she'd totally forgotten about Cedric's existence or that she wasn't alone in the room.

It was strange, Cedric thought, how everything about her felt so familiar, as if he had known her for a lifetime. He couldn't shake the feeling of warmth that washed over him whenever he was in her presence, a warmth he hadn't felt in a long time.

Lost in his head, Cedric hadn't realized it when Marisol paused her actions, now staring back at him with a curious head tilt. Despite knowing he'd been caught, Cedric still tried to save face, averting his eyes with the speed of light as he cleared his throat, hoping she wouldn't make a point of it.

Marisol smirks, her eyes crinkling at the corners in amusement. "Is there something on my face?" she teases, her tone sour.

It made him smirk in return. It was obvious that she was still feeling slighted by his teasing remarks from earlier.

Cedric shook his head to rid himself of the flush of embarrassment that'd crept up his neck.

"No, nothing," he mutters, cursing at himself for getting caught.

Marisol chuckles a sound that sends a flutter through Cedric's chest. "You know," she begins, her voice softer than he would've expected, "you don't have to be so rude and brash all the time. Whether we like it or not, we're stuck together until we figure something out."

Cedric's heart skips a beat at her words, his mind racing with conflicting emotions. He felt every fiber of his being itch with a need to reach out to her, to confide in her, to share the burden of his curse. But at the same time, he feared the consequences of letting her in, feared what she might end up seeing if she looked too closely.

Before he could respond, Marisol changed the subject, taking the silence as an answer. That did not sit well with Cedric for some reason. "I've always wondered how it is that the food is always just here at the right time. I thought you didn't let anyone into the hidden castle. It's like food appeared out of nowhere." She notes, her attention returning to her meal with renewed vigor. Cedric watched her for a moment longer, his mind swirling with unspoken thoughts and unanswered questions.

She looks up and raises a brow at him, "Well? Aren't you going to answer?"

"Would you have preferred I starve to death? Or aren't you happy that you're eating?"

She scoffs at his words, tossing a piece of food around with cutlery, "I mean..... everyone makes a fuss about how this place is off limits and wouldn't even near the entrance in their right minds so pardon me if I'm a little curious." She sasses and Cedric stifles a sigh.

"What exactly do you want, woman?"

"Nothing much." she shrugs and then there's a pause before she adds, "Thinking about it objectively, what I truly want is something you cannot offer, at least not until you're sane again, so I'll settle with answers to my question for now."

Cedric felt his ears perk and eyes slightly widen at that, picking her words apart. He wanted so badly to ask what it was that she wanted and believed he couldn't do and to go ahead and grant her exactly that, but he just couldn't bring himself to, so, he settled down too.

"Recently, I've been a bit more grounded, plus I revert to my human form these days unlike before, so I need to be catered to."

Marisol makes a noise of understanding at that, nodding in understanding. "We need to start working on figuring you out then. Going to need to try and know better, about, like, the root of your curse, how to break it, and my part in all of this."

Cedric raises a brow. She makes it sound like it was a walk in the park.

"What do you mean 'root'?"

"I have a little knowledge of magic." She sighs, pushing her plate away. "I know that every spell stems from somewhere. It's either granted by good or bad spirits, you know.... things like that."

And no, Cedric does not know.

"Is that why they sent you here? To cure me?" He says indignantly.

Something about the way she spoke, like he was an experiment to be poked and probed at was beginning to annoy Cedric. Was she another one of his brother's plots? Hadn't they realized that he was beyond their little games?

"Oh please," she laughs, the sound lacking any hint of amusement "Brought? More like fooled, kidnapped, and then imprisoned." She says and Cedric's brows furrow.

'Kidnapped? What did she mean by that?'

"Look." She says exasperatedly, "I'm tired of pretending that this isn't my new reality or that whatever is happening here isn't real. I take it that you know about the prophecy, the one I'm in?"

If Cedric was confused before, now he was baffled. What prophecy? There's a prophecy about Redwood involving her? But how? Weren't prophecies from witch covens?

"Yeah, you have no idea." She deadpans after a beat of his confused silence, "Somehow I'm tied to you and your curse and am supposed to do something to set you and your pack free. No one understands why, how, when, where, or what it is that I'm even expected to do, but it's been drawing out for way too long now. The sooner we figure it out, the sooner I get out of here and go home."

"Is it because you think we're mates?" Cedric spits out forcefully. He had been planning to ignore that truth for as long as possible, but it seemed there was still a lot more about the woman in front of him that he needed to know.

Marisol's reaction to his words leaves a sour taste in his mouth. "Your brother bewitched me into thinking he was my mate, then lured me to this place. I would be foolish to fall for that trick twice." She answers with a determined glare.

"What?" Cedric growls. The first thought in his head was the very well-known behavioral pattern of werewolves discovering their destined mates. The thought of her being like that with Caleb, him getting in such close proximity to her or even touching her had him seeing red.

He was still fuming when he heard her speak again, "This could be another of his tricks. We are not mates. I'm only here to help you and get out."

Despite being very aware that she was lying through her teeth, her declaration hurt. It was surprising, the pain he felt at her words. He hadn't felt any emotion, especially not pain, in a long time now. He'd thought he was finally beyond all that. Yet, he could feel his heart squeeze in his chest, the organ feeling like it could as well be shriveling up and draining of blood.

"Anyway, no one thinks we're mates. The possibility of it hasn't crossed their minds. Either that, or they're doing a good job at hiding it, and I'd prefer that it remains that way."

Cedric hears his wolf howl gratingly in his head, the sound a mix of hurt and anger. It wanted him to prove her wrong. It would only require a single touch to have eaten her words, but Cedric forces himself to remain still. This would make things easier for him.

"You're right," he agreed with a stiff nod of his head, his fingers balling into fists where they sat on his lap. "We're not mates. You help me, and I'll help you too, see to it that you're set free. Deal."

"Perfect. Deal." She accepts with an ease that almost sends Cedric spiraling. He was struggling to keep his composure, yet she seemed to be in perfect condition, sounding relieved even.

"I'll be going now. Maybe later we can discuss more on how to break your curse." She didn't wait for a reply as she was out of his sight in just a matter of seconds. Cedric is stupefied.