

Chapter 153

Marisol seethed angrily as she followed Cedric's wolf back to the hidden castle. Every step felt like an eternity, her frustration and resentment boiling beneath the surface. She wanted to scream, to lash out at Cedric for his reckless behavior, but she knew it would be futile. Cedric was in his wolf form, and her words would be ignored.

As they entered the throne room, Marisol's rage finally peaked as the wolf sauntered in with an air of smugness, lounging on the throne as if it owned the place, an exact copy of Cedric himself. Marisol clenched her fists, resisting the urge to strike out at the creature before her, nails digging into her palms as she fought to control her temper. How dare he play such a cruel trick on them? She distractedly wondered how Lily was doing, concerned making her lips' downturn as she lifted her head to find the wolf's eyes on her. Marisol was not mistaken when she saw a swirl of amusement in them. Her annoyance boils over.

"You think this is funny?" Marisol spat, her voice trembling with anger. "You think it's amusing to terrorize innocent people?"

The wolf offered no response. Its gaze is now fixed on some invisible point in the distance. For some reason, Marisol's rage grows at being ignored, her berating words pouring forth like a torrent of fury.

"You have no right to treat people like pawns in your twisted game," Marisol continued, her voice rising with each word. "You have no idea the fear you instilled in Lily, the pain you caused her. And for what? Your own selfish amusement?"

The wolf remained impassive, but Marisol did not miss how its eyes shifted to meet hers, as if daring her to continue even though its mysterious gaze betrayed nothing. Another surge of frustration courses through Marisol's veins, her anger threatening to consume her whole.

"You're heartless," Marisol said through clenched teeth, her voice thick with emotion. "You're nothing but a cruel, heartless beast."

The wolf's response came in the form of a low growl this time. This conversation was obviously going nowhere, and Marisol felt herself tethered right on the edge of a mental breakdown.

"Ugh! I hate you! You and your stupid wolf, I hate everything about this place!" she cried out, her chest heaving.

What followed after was silence, one so thick that you could almost breathe it in. Then, without warning, Marisol collapses onto the floor, her anger spent, and her body wracked with exhaustion.

She laid there, spent and defeated, for a while before her eyelids grew heavy with sleep. Despite her anger and frustration, Marisol couldn't fight the overwhelming urge to rest.

With a weary sigh, she closed her eyes and surrendered to the darkness, her mind finally finding solace in the embrace of sleep.

When Marisol stirred awake the following day, soft lights filtered through a window, casting a gentle glow over the space where she lay. Disoriented from sleep, she blinks, rubbing the sleep from her eyes. It took her a moment to realize where she was, and for a quick second, she wondered how she'd gotten there. Her gaze darted around the room, searching for any sign of Cedric, but he was conspicuously absent. At once, the memories of the previous night come flooding back, bringing a surge of irritation with it.

She groaned as it played out behind her lids, over and over again, like a broken record, and before she knew it, Marisol was up and out of bed in search of him. She briskly made her way out of the room and headed straight for the dining area, where Cedric was waiting for her. Thankfully, it was human this time.

As Marisol nears, her eyes narrow into accusatory slits when he raises his head to look at her. Instead of immediately taking a seat, Marisol used the added height advantage to stare him down, arms coming to fold across her chest, "What was that stunt you pulled last night?" she demanded, her voice tinged with frustration.

Cedric, looking relaxed in his chair, merely shrugged in response, his expression unreadable. "You broke your end of the bargain," he answered calmly as if the previous night's events were of little consequence.

Marisol's eyebrows shot up in disbelief. "Bargain? What bargain?" she all but cried, her incredulity palpable.

Ignoring her question, Cedric gestured toward the vacant chair beside him, inviting her to sit and join him for breakfast. Marisol, however, remained rooted to the spot, shaking her head adamantly in refusal.

"You look hungry, Marisol. Your food has been waiting for quite a while. Sit." He demanded, and Marisol had to suck in a breath to rein herself in.

"That's not the answer to my question, Cedric." She reminded him, keeping her tone firm and slow. Cedric rose from his seat, a determined gleam in his eyes as he started to close the distance between them.

Marisol felt her pulse quicken as he drew nearer, commanding attention and igniting a whirlwind of conflicting emotions within her. His scent and warmth overwhelmed her senses, sending a pleased shiver down her spine. Despite her anger, despite her resolve to keep her distance, she couldn't deny the pull she felt towards him, a constant at this point.

Memories of their heated argument flashed before her eyes, the sting of his cutting words still fresh in her mind. Still, beneath the veneer of hostility, Marisol could not ignore the feelings of longing she'd only just realized as such now that they were in close proximity again, realized how she'd missed him, worried about him, and longed for the electric thrum of the connection they shared.

The tension between them was palpable as Cedric stood before her, their eyes locked in a silent battle of wills. Marisol felt her resolve waver as she struggled under the intensity of his gaze, the air around them crackling with tension.

"Sit," Cedric repeated, his voice low and commanding.

Marisol swallowed hard, her heart pounding as she struggled to maintain her composure. She could see the conflict in Cedric's eyes, the battle raging within him as he fought to control his emotions. It was as if she had been drawn into his orbit. The magnetic pull between them feels too strong to resist. Cedric's words had never left her head since he'd spat them out the other day, his admittance of their bond stirring something profound within Marisol's soul.

Unconsciously, Marisol found herself inching closer to Cedric, needing more of whatever his mere presence was coaxing out of her.

Cedric's voice cuts through the air like a blade breaking the silence, his words laden with a raw honesty that leaves Marisol reeling. "We can't keep lying to ourselves."

"What?" She exclaimed, fingers suddenly itching with the need to touch, and at that moment, as if doubled by the intensity of his emotions, Cedric's scent wafted through the air, hitting Marisol with the intensity of a tsunami, and she felt her knees buckle, almost giving out from beneath her. Just as quickly, before she could completely lose her footing, a strong arm was around her waist, holding her up.

Marisol sucked in a breath. The feeling of his arm around her was definitely new but not unpleasant. Quite the opposite, if anything, and it felt like every one of her nerves was doing a happy dance. She had to physically wrestle back an urge to whine and sink deeper into his hold. She needed more, wanted to be wrapped entirely in his essence, and for Cedric to never let go. Slowly, she lifted her head to look at him, peeking from just beneath her long lashes.

"You betrayed our agreement. The very one you suggested yourself. Or is your memory already failing you?" Cedric said, his words strung tight and lacking any of the bite he'd have hoped to.

Marisol's heart hammered in her chest as she absorbed his words. She remembered their agreement, the tentative truce they had formed to navigate their complicated bond.

She was still struggling for what would be an appropriate answer when, with a heavy sigh, Marisol felt Cedric pull away, his warmth completely disappearing and leaving Marisol at a loss, watching him go as a whirlwind of emotions swirled within her -guilt, longing, uncertainty.

As Cedric disappeared from view, Marisol sank into a nearby chair, her limbs finally giving in and thoughts running a mile a minute.

Without even knowing, she began to eat. It was a slow process, and through it, it felt as though she had been numbed completely, not even tasting the meal. It was almost robotic because her hand movements looked like a mechanic, measured practice.

Meanwhile, a storm of guilt brewed in her head, and no matter how much she tried to fight it, it continued raging. She finished her meal, silent and restless, and still unable to find it in herself to move. She remained at the table for a while before she finally got to her feet, coming to a resolve.

No matter how she thought about it, all her thoughts ended with Cedric deserving some apology, but she didn't know if she could give him one.

Slowly, she makes her way out of the dining hall. Then, she traversed the corridors of the hidden castle, her footsteps echoing softly against the stone walls.

Unsure of her next course of action and how to face Cedric, she bypassed the familiar route to the throne room where she was certain Cedric would be and instead made her way to the library.

To her surprise, she met Cedric in the library, seemingly engrossed in the pages of one of the various books he had laid on the table. Another wave of guilt washed over her. Marisol was supposed to be working together, and she abandoned him. For a moment, Marisol hesitated, unsure of what to do. Should she go somewhere else or stay? How was she supposed to approach him?

Once again, she considered offering an apology and becoming confident with it, but the words caught in her throat suffocated by the weight of her guilt. So she remained silent, opting to observe Cedric from a distance instead.

After a while, Cedric glanced up from his reading, his gaze meeting hers with a quiet intensity that locked Marisol into place. She froze, waiting for his next course of action or words, but nothing came. Instead, Cedric returned to his book, like he'd only just looked up to confirm her presence.

"You're free to go," he said this time, not looking up from his book, a tone void of emotion.

Marisol's heart sank at his words, a pang of regret coursing through her veins. She knew she should say something, anything to alleviate the tension between them, but the words eluded her. Instead, she remains standing stupidly, grappling with the overwhelming guilt that threatened to consume her.

"I know you need to check on your friend," he spoke again, his voice softening ever so slightly. "You're not a prisoner here. If you choose not to return, that's your decision to make, too."

Marisol's breath caught in her throat. His words had pierced through the silence like a blade, cutting through the walls she had erected around her heart.

What had come over him? The sudden change only increased the guilt brewing within Marisol, and only now did she realize she hadn't been prepared for any other version of Cedric that wasn't bold and commanding. She hadn't anticipated such leniency from him.

Torn between the desire to stay and confront Cedric and the longing to escape the weight of her guilt, Marisol felt trapped. She wished he would look at her and give her some sort of reaction; anything would suffice at this point, and Marisol found herself missing the times they would argue. She hadn't expected a lack of attention from Cedric to evoke this much emotion within her.

She weighed her options, unable to take her eyes off Cedric, who still looked wholly engrossed in his book. He didn't need her, and he'd made the fact known. Marisol felt her shoulders sag as the finality of a decision weighed upon her.

With one final glance his way, Marisol turned on her heel and made for the exit, her footsteps echoing softly against the stone floor.

As soon as she disappeared from view, Cedric groaned, a deep breath following after. He hadn't expected Marisol to follow after him after their little encounter in the dining room. It'd excited him and it took everything in him to resist the urge to just throw caution out of the window and claim her lips.

He remembered quite clearly how she reacted in the dining area. The way her eyes widened, and the slightest hint of her arousal tormented him. If he had stayed there for one more second, he would have done something that they both would have regretted.

Cedric meant what he said when he told her that he wouldn't force her to do anything. He felt partly guilty of the treatment she received when she arrived at his pack. His foolish brother and his mate handled things poorly and restricted her freedom. And they did all that because of him. So, instead of making things worse, Cedric thought it's right to grant her wish and set Marisol free.

Besides, he was never very much better when it came to control of his faculties. He still felt the strong pull of Guinevere's dark magic lurking in his skull, but thanks to Marisol's presence, the effect had somehow been dulled. All he had to do was stay as far away from the moonlight as possible every night, and he could continue living normally.

The most important thing was figuring out how to break the curse and decipher the prophecy. But firstly, he needed to find the source of the prophecy. Caleb must have been in touch with a witch to get the prophecy, and whoever it was had to be still present in Redwood, as that must've been the only way they could keep Marisol trapped till now.

He knew from experience that a witch was never far from their spell. He was confident that Caleb's witch was lurking around in Redwood. It was the same way he knew that Guinevere had been keeping tabs on him.

Taking another long drag of the surrounding air that still held hints of Marisol's scent, Cedric snaps his book shut. He needed to talk with his brother.