

Chapter 161

Cedric stirred awake for the second time that day to a sight he still couldn't bring himself to believe. As soon as his gaze fell on Marisol, he couldn't, for the life of him, tear his gaze away from her sleeping form. She looked so serene in her slumber, so beautiful, ethereal even.

Unconsciously, a content smile brightened his features. He'd worn her out to exhaustion. That warmed his heart. A chuckle threatened to escape his lips at his own silly thoughts, but he'd be damned if he selfishly disturbed her sleep.

He tentatively lifted a finger to lightly trace the slope of her nose, then the outline of her kiss-swollen lips. How on earth had he bagged Marisol?

He didn't deserve her. And with that thought, the euphoria of their mating ceremony wears off. He immediately retracted his hand and rolled out of bed abruptly, the cold fingers of realization gripping him harshly.

"What the hell was I thinking!" Cedric thought to himself as he began to pace back and forth, a nervous habit he'd developed since Marisol came into the picture.

How could he have been so careless? How could he have allowed himself to give in to his desires, knowing full well the consequences? He'd promised himself to stay away from her, yet what had he done? He'd gone and sealed their mating bond, and now they were connected forever. His fingers ran through the strands of his hair, tugging at it in frustration.

There was no way he was worthy of someone as otherworldly as Marisol. This was going to be hell for her even if she hadn't realized it yet. She was beautiful, perfect in every way and Cedric..... he was a beast. He was chained to the darkness and cursed to spend the rest of his days wallowing in it.

A wave of self-loathing washed over him as he berated himself for his weakness. How could he have been so selfish, so reckless? Marisol deserved so much better than this.... than him. She deserved someone who could give her the world, someone who wasn't going to force her into spending the rest of her days navigating a curse.

Cedric cursed at himself for not trying harder, for being weak in the face of his primal instincts. It was a truth that he couldn't deny now. He couldn't live without Marisol, not after discovering her existence. She was his anchor, a lifeline in a world consumed by darkness.

Without her, he would be lost. She was his sanity. She gave him life, hope, peace and solace in a world that was beginning to weigh down on him, but what did he do? There was nothing he had to offer. If anything, he would only ruin her, drag her down to be at his level and stay there with him.

"No." Cedric decided resolutely. Marisol deserved nothing less than the world, and he would do everything in his power to ensure that she got it, even if it meant letting her go.

Hurriedly he threw his clothes on, intending to escape both Marisol and his thoughts.

"Cedric?" Just as he reached the door, he heard her sleepy voice call, causing Cedric to freeze in his tracks, his hand still clutching the doorknob. He shut his eyes in resignation before slowly turning around to face her, his heart pounding in his chest at the sight of her sitting up, her confused eyes fixed on him, swirling with a mixture of concern and curiosity.

"Where are you going?" She spoke again, her voice soft but insistent.

Cedric swallowed heavily, caught off guard by her sudden awakening. "I... I just needed some air," he stuttered out, his gaze flickering away from her intense stare. He really, really needed to get out.

Marisol frowned at that, the sleepy haze clearing at once as her brows knit together in confusion. "You ... need air?" she repeated, her tone incredulous.

"That's what I said, do I need to repeat myself?" He snapped, doing the exact opposite of what he terribly wished to be doing at the moment.

Marisol's brow furrowed in frustration, her lips pressing into a thin line. "You know we can hear each other's thoughts and feelings now, right?" she settled, watching as Cedric plowed his hands through his hair.

"You don't have to lie to me, Cedric," she continued, her tone soft and lulling. "I can feel what you're feeling. I know what you're thinking."

Cedric's jaw pulled taut, his eyes darting away from hers as shame flooded his senses. He'd forgotten about the bond. He had never felt so exposed, so vulnerable, in front of anyone before. And the thought of Marisol hearing his darkest thoughts filled him with a sense of dread.

He couldn't even form the words to defend himself. Every single cell of his body ached to fall into her arms and be back in that moment where they cared about nothing other than the other, but he couldn't do that, no. He needed to protect her, even from himself.

But Marisol wasn't about to let him off the hook that easily. "I can hear your thoughts." She repeated gently. Cedric sucks in a breath. This was not how he'd intended his escape to go.

"You don't have to carry this burden alone, Cedric. You're not a monster."

He scoffed bitterly at that, fingers balling into fists at his sides. "You don't understand," he muttered, his voice barely above a whisper. "I'm cursed, Marisol. I..... I don't deserve this. I don't deserve you."

Marisol's eyes flashed with anger as she got to her feet, her entire demeanor taking on a different track as she snapped at him, her voice ringing with authority. "Don't you dare say that, Cedric? You're not walking away from this. We're mates. Bound together by fate and nobody is more deserving of the other, we're equals in this."

Cedric swallowed hard, his throat feeling tight with emotion. He couldn't bear the thought of hurting Marisol, yet he couldn't shake the feeling that he was doomed to do just that.

"Talk to me, Cedric." She pressed after a few more minutes of silence.

His chest tightened at her words, a lump forming in his throat as he struggled to hold back the tide of emotions threatening to overwhelm him. "It's... it's not your concern," he retorted weakly, his voice barely above a whisper.

"You can't keep pushing me away, Cedric," she insisted, firm and unrelenting. "We're mated now, whether you like it or not."

Cedric felt a surge of guilt washed over him at her words. How could she still want him after everything he had done? After she'd witnessed the darkness that lurked within him?

Her words struck a chord deep within him, stirring something primal and raw. Cedric growled in frustration, fingers digging into his palm with how hard he was clenching them. "Don't talk to me like that," he warned, his voice low and dangerous.

She huffed out an unamused smile, "How exactly am I talking? Is it the truth that bothers you so much?"

She was right, but his pride refused to let him show his vulnerability. "Watch your tone, Marisol," he growled, resisting the urge to close the distance between them and shut her up in a way that neither of them would refuse.

Marisol's eyes blazed with defiance, her chin lifted stubbornly as she met his gaze head-on. "I don't know you to be a coward, Cedric," she shot back, her voice unwavering. "Don't start now."

Choosing to ignore her, he turned back around to face the door. Irritation flared within him. Who was she to tell him what to do?

As he turned to leave, Marisol's voice echoed through the room again, filled with desperation and fear. "Please, Cedric... stay."

But he wasn't having it. He wasn't going to stay. Wrapping his fingers around the door knob stiffly, he swung it open harshly, determined to walk out of it no matter what.

"I'm not going to let you walk out on me again, Cedric, stay!" She cried out and just like that, the door slammed itself shut with a deafening crash, the force of it sending Cedric stumbling back into the room.

He paused, staring at the shut door in disbelief as his heart pounded wildly in his chest. Then, he turned around, his jaw slacked.

For a moment, they simply stood there, staring at each other in stunned silence. He looked from her to the door, then back at the door before he approached it again, tentatively wrapping his fingers around the knob again and pulling. It refused to budge, even as Cedric did so a few more times, almost like it was unaware of the force being exerted on it.

Just then the scent of Marisol's fear reached his nose, filling the room. He could hear her berating herself as he now turned around, features softening.

"Hey," he called, Marisol's chest heaving as she stared at her feet.

"Oh goddess, what just happened?" She wailed, sounding breathless, and Cedric hastened in his steps.

On reaching Marisol, he reached out to touch her trembling form, "Hey, hey, you're okay. It's fine, I'm here. I'm still here, Princess, breathe." he coaxed softly, his voice filled with tenderness as he pulled her into his arms.

They stood together in the quiet room, their hearts beating as one. Cedric gently pressed a kiss on Marisol's forehead while she sucked in heavy breaths. The last thing he wanted was to hurt her or make her doubt her beautiful self.

After a while, with Marisol now more collected, they approached the door cautiously. Slowly, Cedric pulled at it again, not as harshly this time, seeing that Marisol remained perched at his side, his arm around her waist.

It remained unmoving, and they exchanged looks. In a silent agreement, Marisol reached out this time, but, before her fingers even reached the doorknob, it swung open by itself. As if activated by just her proximity.

Marisol's eyes widened in shock, a gasp leaving her lips as she realized what had just happened. "Did I... did I do that?" she whispered, her voice trembling.

Cedric could only nod, his mind still reeling with disbelief. "I think you did," he murmured, his gaze fixed on her with a newfound sense of awe.

Marisol's breath began to grow heavier again, each one more shaky than the last, and Cedric pulled her closer, small shushing noises leaving his lips.

"Hey, hey, princess," he whispered, holding her gaze as wide eyes stared back at him, her panic evident in them. "I said breathe for me. We're fine. Don't panic."

Marisol breathed out a shaky exhale as she pointed at the door. "How..... didn't you see that?!"

"Yeah, I did." He chuckled.

"You were going to walk out and I just..."

"You're amazing," he cut in, a small smile tugging at the corners of his lips. "Every day, you surprise me more and more."

And like a switch had been flipped in his head, Cedric paused abruptly. His brows furrowed as he realizes that something was different. Something had changed within him.

He blinked, eyes narrowing in concentration as he tried to place what it was.

What he felt was a strange sense of calm, a feeling he hadn't experienced in what felt like an eternity. His senses were on high alert as he tried to pinpoint the source of this newfound peace within him.

Then, like a bolt of lightning, it hit him. For the first time in as long as he could remember, his wolf was silent. The raging beast that had tormented him for so long was nowhere to be found. Instead, there was a sense of tranquility, of harmony, it feels like he had longed for but never dared to hope for.

But that wasn't all. Cedric's fragmented memories, the ones that had eluded him for so long, seemed to be returning to him in bits and pieces. Faces, places, and events that had been lost to him were now resurfacing, filling in the gaps in his fractured mind.

"Marisol, something's different," he blurted.

Marisol searched his face for an answer, her eyes wide with curiosity. "What do you mean?" she asked, her voice barely above a whisper.

Cedric struggled to find the right words to describe the sensation coursing through him. "It's my wolf," he tried, his voice filled with wonder. "It's... quiet. In my head, it's like.... like it's taking a nap or something. For the first time in forever, it feels calm, like... like normal."

Marisol's eyes widened in surprise, her mind reeling with the implications of Cedric's words. "Does that mean...?" she began, her voice trailing off as she dared to hope for the impossible.

Cedric nodded, a smile spreading across his face. "I think it does," he replied, his voice tinged with disbelief. "I think the curse is broken."

Marisol's heart soared at the realization, her mind racing with possibilities. "But how?" she asked, her voice filled with wonder.

Cedric's smile widened as he took her hand and began to lead her outside. "I have an idea," he said, his voice tinged with excitement. "Follow me."

Marisol followed Cedric, her heart pounding in her chest as she tried to make sense of what was happening. "Where are we going?" she asked, her voice trembling with anticipation.

Cedric glanced back at her, his eyes sparkling with excitement. "To the nearest border," he answered, his voice filled with determination. "Trust me."

Marisol nodded, her heart racing as they approached the border. "Now what?" she asked, her voice barely above a whisper.

Cedric smiled, now taking both of her hands in his as he faced her. "Marisol, I want you to think of something you want," he instructed, the excitement never leaving his voice.

Marisol furrowed her brow in confusion, but Cedric gave her a decisive nod, Marisol following as she closed her eyes and let out a heavy breath, focusing all her energy on her deepest desires. "I'm hungry," she said after a moment, her voice filled with longing.

Suddenly, a gust of wind swept through the air, and before their eyes, a table laden with delicious-looking food appeared before them. Marisol gasped in awe, her eyes wide with wonder.

Cedric burst into laughter, his eyes shining with delight. "Looks like it worked," he announced, looking almost crazed with elation.

Marisol laughed too, her heart soaring with joy. "I can't believe it," she exclaimed, her voice filled with wonder.

Cedric tightened his hold on her hand in his, his heart overflowing with gratitude as he gazed into her eyes. There were so many things he wished he could say to her right now, but he settled for a "Thank you, Marisol," his voice filled with emotion. "You.... You've broken the curse. You've set me free, Marisol."

Marisol felt her eyes well up with tears as she realized the magnitude of what they had accomplished. "I can't believe it," she whispered, her voice trembling with emotion. "The prophecy."

Cedric smiled, wrapping his arms around her.

"That's not all. I think there's something in it for you too."

"Really?" Marisol gasped, her eyes shining with curiosity.

Holding her close, Cedric led her towards the invisible barrier that had kept her trapped here for so long. As they approached, Marisol gave him a skeptical look, steps dragging as he did not look like he would be stopping anytime soon.

"Uhm, I don't think that's a good idea....." She mumbled, eyes closing as she braced herself for impact. However, that didn't happen. They'd glided through the barrier like a knife through butter.

"What?" She cried in disbelief.

Cedric watched in amusement as she proceeded to walk back and forth through the now-disabled barrier several times with glee. She squealed loudly in excitement as she leaped into his arms. Cedric held her up with ease as she wiggled around in his arms, beyond elated.

"I cannot believe this! I'm free!"