

Chapter 119

The Dark Moon Pack's annual ball was a grand affair, a night of celebration and revelry. But for Marisol, it was a night of dread. She knew that something was wrong. It felt so imminent, and it loomed over her head like a dark cloud. Something was so off, but she couldn't put a finger on it.

The werewolf dignitaries had arrived from their various packs, their presence filling the air with an undercurrent of power and tension. At first, Marisol felt their eyes on her, their judgment and scrutiny unmasked. She wanted to disappear, to make herself so small that she would be imperceptible.

However, against all odds, the celebration seemed to be going off without a hitch so far, exceeding Marisol's expectations in grandeur and splendor.

The ballroom sparkled with an array of lights, and the air hummed with the infectious energy of celebration.

Marisol's meticulous planning had transformed the space into a breathtaking spectacle that left everyone in awe and Nicole did not miss a chance to let her know just how well she'd done. She showers her daughter with praises every other minute as she continues to gasp at whatever new detail she finds.

"This is beyond beautiful, Marisol! I can't believe you pulled all of this together."

Liam, beaming with pride, boasted to anyone who would listen, "Our daughter planned the entire event. Isn't she incredible?" Making Marisol burn with embarrassment and even hiding away, so she didn't have to hear the rest of the conversation.

Despite it all, Marisol herself couldn't deny the success of her hard work. The shattered remains of her nightmares that had plagued her even in the real world had mysteriously ceased too, allowing her to bask in the joy of the moment.

As the event kicked off, Liam took center stage for an introductory speech, addressing the gathered pack members and guests. "Tonight, we celebrate not just the unity of our pack and the werewolf kind, but also a remarkable milestone, Marisol, my beautiful daughter's twenty-first birthday. She's grown into a true leader, and tonight is a testament to her strength and dedication."

As Marisol listened to her father's words, a wave of reassurance washed over her. His speech alleviated the tension coiled within her and a sense of belonging settled within her soul once again. This was her father whom she loved and respected, and whose footsteps she'd grown up following in. Nothing was going to change that. The night was going unbelievably smoothly and Marisol felt her shoulder grow lighter in relief.

"I couldn't be more proud of you, Marisol," her father's voice carried through the hall, reaching her ears. "Your dedication and love for our pack shine through in every detail of this splendid evening."

She blushes hard at the attention from all around the room. Marisol looked up to her parents a lot. She'd heard the story of their love and the trials they overcame together. Her father was formidable, the best possible partner to her mother and the best father a girl could ask for. Her mother was impeccable and handled her position perfectly with grace and that air of confidence she always carried with her. Most times, Marisol feared she would never be able to fill their shoes, but on hearing her father's words and seeing her mother's enthusiastic nods of approval from her spot next to him, Marisol felt her confidence and determination grow. This was just what she needed.

"I want to thank Marisol for making this night so special." He continues. "It's a reflection of the love and unity that defines us werewolves. Each pack represented here tonight is woven with the strongest bonds that nature and the moon goddess herself have blessed us with. So everyone, have a good time tonight. Be merry, have fun. Let's drink till we drop!" He urges loudly, and the crowd erupts in cheers, and Marisol's heart swells with a newfound happiness.

"Come here, Mare," Liam calls softly this time, "You're tonight's host, and we'd all love to hear from you."

Grinning, Marisol nods and makes her way up to the stage.

"Thank you so much," she beams " I'm so happy to have you all here to celebrate such a beautiful and defining night with us. We welcome our visitors. Thank you for coming all the way to honor us. Thank you for going out of your way with the gifts. I appreciate every single one and, as the Alpha and my wonderful Dad have said, let's celebrate and have fun together!"

The response was immediate. Everyone cheered even louder.

At that moment, she decides to reopen her connection with the pack. It proves easy with her mind and heart at peace, allowing the familiar warmth of their bond to wash over her.

Instantly, a rush of warmth and affection flooded her senses as the pack wasted no time embracing her in a collective wave of love and support. It was a blissful moment, a reaffirmation of her place within the tight-knit community she cherishes.

"I missed this," Marisol hummed contentedly, a smile tugging at her lips as she dismounted the stage.

The party unfurls into a seamless blend of music, laughter, and the clinking of glasses. Marisol, surrounded by friends and pack members, reveled in the infectious joy that permeated the air.

Estella, appearing by her side, dons a smile, "You've really outdone yourself, Marisol. This is incredible."

"Thanks, Estella. It means a lot," Marisol replies, mirroring her expression, her gaze sweeping across the lively gathering.

As the night wore on, Marisol danced and laughed along with the crowd, her worries long forgotten. The evening was coming to a close and with every look she spared at the joyful partygoers, she felt a sense of contentment and accomplishment wash over her.

Just when she thought the celebration had reached its conclusion, Nicole, her mother, approached with a mysterious glint in her eye.

"Marisol, darling, there's something I've been keeping for this special moment," she says, a mischievous smile playing on her lips as she gestures towards a hidden corner of the ballroom.

Marisol's curiosity piqued, wondering how she'd missed that earlier. She follows her mother's lead, her heart pounding with anticipation. As they reach the secluded spot, Nicole pulls at a tarp to reveal a beautiful treasure chest, adorned with intricate carvings and shimmering with an ethereal glow.

"Mom, what is this?" Marisol asked, her eyes widened with wonder as she gazed upon the stunning chest.

"It's something I've been working on secretly for a while now," Nicole hums, her own eyes twinkling with excitement. With a flick of her wrist, she opens the chest to reveal a collection of heirloom jewelry, each piece radiating with ancient beauty and significance.

Marisol gasps in astonishment, both hands coming to clasp over her gaping lips, "Mom, this.... this is...." She is unable to find the right words, already tearing up and her mother nods again.

"I know just how much you cherish our pack's history," Nicole says, eyes and tone soft, filled with affection. "These pieces have been passed down through generations. I've restored them, and now, I want you to have them."

Overwhelmed with emotion, Marisol surges forward and envelops her mother in a tight embrace, tears of joy threatening to fall from her eyes. "Thank you, Mom. This... this means the world to me."

Nicole held her daughter close, savoring the warmth of her embrace, "You deserve every bit of it, my dear. Wear them with pride but.... I'm not done yet." She laughs, pulling away.

Marisol shook her head in disbelief, lips still hanging open. "Mom, you can't be serious! Nothing could possibly top this."

Her mom giggles, a hush falling over the guests as Nicole beckons Marisol to another corner of the grand ballroom.

"Marisol, my love, there's one more surprise for you," Nicole whispered, a conspiratorial smile playing on her lips.

Curiosity flickered in Marisol's eyes as she followed after her mother, still short of words. The atmosphere buzzed with anticipation, and Marisol couldn't help but wonder what else awaited her.

Suddenly, the lights dimmed, and a spotlight illuminated a previously unnoticed stage. In the center stood a group of performers, ready to showcase a dazzling display of fire dancing, an art Marisol had always dreamed of witnessing.

Gasps of awe echoed through the room as the act opened with the flames performing a hypnotic dance as though with a mind of their own. Marisol's eyes widened, elated beyond measure.

Nicole grins, an accomplished smile on her lips as she watches her daughter's eyes stay glued to the stage. "I remember how you once told me about your fascination with fire dancing and fire. This was the perfect occasion to give you your very own show. Happy birthday, Marisol!"

Overwhelmed with joy, Marisol feels a tear of sheer happiness roll down her cheek as she laughs wetly, "Mom, you didn't have to do this! This is amazing!"

Nicole pulls her into a warm embrace, sniffing at her neck. Marisol felt like she would burst with the overflowing joy she felt. First, the heirloom, and now the performance? She still couldn't believe she was getting all this. She'd always had a strong obsession with fire as a kid, which was a bit unusual as werewolves would typically never be a fan of it.

The performance by the dancers using fake flames was the closest she would ever get to it. And she loved it even then, now witnessing the real thing felt all the more intense and even more beautiful than she could have ever imagined. Marisol felt a profound gratitude for the love and thoughtfulness of her parents and those around her. The flames, twirling and leaping in rhythmic harmony, seemed to reflect the warmth that emanated from the bonds of family and pack.

The night had already been unforgettable, but this unexpected surprise elevated it to a level of enchantment Marisol had never imagined. In the glow of the fire dancing, surrounded by the love of her pack and the embrace of her mother, Marisol's heart overflowed with gratitude for the extraordinary celebration that marked her twenty-first birthday.

As the night progressed, the realization that she was now legally an adult prompted her to lose part of her shyness.

The vibrant lights illuminated the dance floor, casting a kaleidoscope of colors that mirrored the joyous atmosphere. Still full of excitement, Marisol decided it was time to indulge in a drink or two, eager to savor the newfound freedom that came with her new age.

With a mischievous grin, Marisol approached the bar, where Estella awaited her. "Cheers to finally being legal!" she exclaims loudly, raising her glass.

Estella laughs, clinking their glasses together, "To your legality, daring adventures, and unforgettable memories!"

The two friends down the content of glasses, uncontrolled laughter leaving their lips and they joined the lively dance floor. As the music swirled around them, Marisol's inhibitions loosened. They navigated through the crowd, laughter and music enveloping them as they mixed into the bubbly atmosphere.

The pulsating beats of the music urged Marisol to lose herself in the rhythm. She and Estella twirled and swayed, their laughter blending with the melody that echoed through the grand ballroom.

Amidst the dance and laughter, Marisol finds herself switching partners, guided by the infectious rhythm.

After a few dances, Marisol tires out and decides to call it a night. Stiffing a yawn, she looked around in search of Estella.

Just then, a new beat flows into that of the slowly dying one, and just like that, she is being swirled around until she falls into the arms of a first partner and the second she does she feels that zap, as if being electrocuted and soothed immediately after.

She immediately freezes in place, her eyes finding his ever so slowly as he releases his seemingly unwilling partner. Sharp eyes, an enchanting swirl of amber stare right back at her, ever so slightly shielded by his tousled raven hair.

Marisol forgets how to breathe, every part of her body painfully aware of the man in front of her. The music was playing ever so loudly around them, but Marisol heard nothing of that, the world around her dulling in contrast to the loud thumping against her chest.

His lips move, "Hi." He says, the rich timbre of his voice igniting a fire hot enough to turn her insides to mush.

Marisol couldn't find her voice. She continued to stare into his eyes, which seemed to bore right into hers, staring right into the depths of her soul, unearthing whatever secrets they held.

"Can I have this dance?" He tries again, extending his palm and, still dumbfounded, Marisol finds her body moving on its own, her fingers slipping into his, and she gasps lowly at the contact again.

The mysterious young man guides her back to the dance floor, a soft smile never leaving his lips. Turning to face the other, they begin to move slowly to the now slower music and when he tentatively wraps an arm around her, Marisol feels like a bomb just shy of exploding. Despite not at all paying attention, Marisol senses their bodies moving in perfect synchrony, a sort of charge between them that fans the flames of the fire his touch had ignited from the first contact.

Every touch was electric, sending shivers down her spine. She finds herself captivated by the elegance and poise he moves with, letting himself be eased into his pace. The world around them entirely fades into nothing, leaving only him, this stranger with his firm grip around her, guiding her every step with an unmatched ease.

He held her gaze the entire time too, with an intensity that looked to match just what Marisol was feeling at the moment. It was in those shared glances, in the way their bodies moved in sync, that a realization dawned upon Marisol.

Everything that had happened in the past few months suddenly made sense. She'd been thrown into a pit of misery, the constant feeling of emptiness and fear her only company until he came along. He felt like a breath of fresh air, his hold around her sure and a whisper of a promise to never let go.

Marisol may or may have not imagined the way his eyes seemed to flicker with something darker, but they fueled her imagination nonetheless. Images of tangled limbs underneath thin sheets swarmed her senses and left a part of her tingling with want. It definitely wasn't a figment of her imagination how he reacted, his nails digging into the flesh of her skin like he could read her mind, see inside her head. She could almost hear his voice in her head.

By the time the dance concludes, Marisol is left wishing it wouldn't. As they parted, the air between them crackled with an unspoken understanding. It was as if the universe conspired to create this moment, intensifying every sensation.

"I'm Caleb," he introduces, his voice a whisper that travels electrically through every single fibre of Marisol's body.

"Caleb," she repeats breathlessly, tasting the name on her tongue, and he sucks in a breath. "I'm Marisol."

In one swift movement, his arms were wrapped around her waist, causing their bodies to collide, and an agonizingly slow growl escaped his lips as he took her face into his palm before pressing their lips together in a breathtaking kiss, one Marisol both melted into and scrambled to return just as fiercely, all of her senses heightened being so close and taking a part of him that felt so rightly hers.

"Mine," Caleb whispers hotly against her lips, when he finally pulls away.

'Mate!' Her wolf growls in her head, over the moon, and Marisol's eyes snap open from where she'd been chasing after the addictive feeling of his lips on hers.

"Mine," she repeats, equally as breathless, eyes still hazy from the intoxicating feeling.

Caleb's eyes bore into hers as he swallowed, his Adam's apple bobbing with the movement, "You're mine forever, Marisol. I found you, my mate." His chest rumbles with the words as he pulls her flush against himself, not even a breath of air separating their bodies.

A giggle escapes Marisol's own lips, feeling giddy as she seals his claim. "Yes, Caden. All yours."