

Chapter 168

Guinevere seethed with fury as she brooded in her frozen state, her mind consumed with rage at Marisol's unwitting intrusion into her realm. The thought of the inexperienced hybrid witch stumbling upon her domain ignited a firestorm of frustration and anger within her.

How dare this mere fledgling possess such power, even in her naivety? Guinevere's pride bristled at the realization that Marisol had already begun to tap into her latent abilities, despite her lack of training and experience. It unsettled her, stirring a deep-seated fear of the unknown.

In her weakened state of hibernation, Guinevere was acutely aware of her vulnerability. She had concealed herself from even her most trusted allies, cloaking herself in secrecy to guard against discovery. Yet Marisol had effortlessly breached her defense, slipping into her realm with unsettling ease.

Had Marisol made even the slightest contact with her, Guinevere would have been trapped within the confines of her own realm, her power whisked away, leaving behind nothing but a hollow shell.

The very idea filled Guinevere with a sense of dread, fueling her determination to act swiftly before it would be too late. She couldn't afford to wait until her hibernation had run its course. By then, Marisol might have already grown to become a formidable adversary.

It was time to set her plans into motion, regardless of what it would cost her in this state. She hadn't garnered enough power yet, and her sacrifice wasn't even ready. The consequences of what she was about to do would be dire, but she couldn't afford to waste any more time. Too much was already at stake, and Redwood was not giving her much of a choice.

Her demons stirred restlessly at her side, eager to carry out her bidding. So she called upon them and upon the dark entities that lurked at the fringes of her being and tasked them with a crucial mission: infiltrate Redwood and seek out a vulnerable soul; preferably a wounded one, ripe for manipulation and corruption.

As the shadows danced around her, eerie whispers of her demands released back into the night, Guinevere felt a surge of dark energy coursing through her veins. There was no turning back now. She had set events into motion that would shape the fate of Redwood and all who dwelled within its borders.

With a sense of grim satisfaction, Guinevere watched as the demons slithered away into the darkness, their mission clear. It was only a matter of time before her plans bore fruit, and when they did, Redwood would tremble before the might of her wrath.

Back at Redwood, Lily paced back and forth, her frustration boiling over at the thought of how unreachable and distant Marisol had become ever since she mated with Cedric. After numerous failed attempts to get an audience with her, Lily couldn't help but feel like she'd been disposed of, consistently overlooked and abandoned by one she considered a close friend.

Ryan finally got out of his seat, deciding he'd had enough of observing her agitation with a skeptical eye from a distance. He couldn't help but feel puzzled by Lily's uncharacteristic behavior. She'd become increasingly aggressive and agitated as the days went by. As he made his way closer, he looked at Maya and Jake, who were too engrossed in their training to care about their surroundings. Looked like this was for him to take care of.

"What's bothering you, Lily?" He asked, smoothly slipping next to her, his voice gentle yet probing.

Lily let out a frustrated huff as if she'd been waiting for a chance to let her woes be heard, "I've been trying to speak to Marisol for days now, but she's always brushing me off for one thing or the other!" she exclaimed. "It's like I don't even exist to her anymore!"

Ryan guessed her concerns were valid, but that doesn't mean Marisol should be faulted, too. Always the more levelheaded one, he tries to be the voice of reason. With a sympathetic nod, he hummed, "I see. But is she not..." He asked, adding when Lily raised a confused brow at him "...busy, that is. She seems to have a lot going on for her these days. It's understandable if she feels overwhelmed by the weight of all that she has to do and can't find time for everything else."

Lily shook her head, her frustration mounting. "But she's always had the time to stay glued to her mate, hasn't she? Look, I know you think I sound ridiculous, but this was a journey we started together! Am I wrong to want to be involved like always? To want to listen and help out like I'd done when she had no one else to do so? It's like I'm invisible now that she has everyone else around her."

Her voice took on a higher note with each word, and at the end of her frustrated rant, she'd caught the attention of both Maya and Jake. They shared a look with Ryan, who beckoned them closer.

"Maybe Maya and Jake can offer some insight," he suggested, gesturing for the confused two to take the floor.

"What's wrong?" Maya mouthed, and Ryan shrugged.

"It's about Marisol." He supplied, and Jake made a sound of realization before scratching at his nape awkwardly.

"Lily, we understand how you feel," Maya began slowly, crouching to be at eye level with the other, "But with the turn things have taken so far, you know how big of a role Marisol has to play in all of it. She wouldn't ignore you on purpose, you know that."

Lily's frustration boiled over, and she sprang to her feet so suddenly that it momentarily stunned Maya, her emotions reaching a breaking point. "You don't get it!" she exclaimed, her voice trembling with emotion. "I thought Marisol and I were friends, but now it feels like she's just thrown me to the side to entertain everybody else! How would you feel if I did that to either of you!"

She doesn't wait for a reply, storming off with her words still hanging in the air, her emotions raw and unchecked. Her friends watched her leave with concern and shock etched into their features.

"That's not the Lily I know," Jake commented briefly after, and Ryan nodded.

"We need to find a way to help her," Maya spoke this time, "She's clearly struggling, and we can't just leave her to keep feeling like she's all alone."

"I'm a bit hurt," Ryan hummed, looking between them all, "I mean, we're still here for her, right? All of us. And we've been here even before Marisol. It's a bit hurtful that she's not seeing us and has all her focus on Marisol instead."

Maya rolled her eyes when Jake nodded in agreement. "I might not recognize this side of Lily, but it's obvious that she's bonded with Marisol. Besides, are we all forgetting that Lily has always been the odd one out among us? Her job at the pack house has kept her mostly away from us, and most times, she has to be filled in on what's been going on with us. She found Marisol as a friend and confidant within the pack house where she had no one. It's obvious from just how excited she was to introduce us. Two of the most important people from different parts of her life. She's allowed to be anxious about losing that, even though I don't think she will, and she just needs to see things from Marisol's point, too."

"True," Ryan sighed, his brows furrowed with concern. "We'll figure something out," he exhaled, determined. "Lily's our friend, we'll get her the audience with Marisol, even if it means kidnapping her."

They all laugh at that until the sound is abruptly cut off when a wave of unusual energy zapped through the air, causing them to freeze, their eyes simultaneously shining gold as they received a warning.

'The south border has been breached by a troop of rogues! We are under attack!'

Meanwhile, Lily stormed through the forest, her frustration guiding her steps as she allowed her anger to consume her. She couldn't shake off the feeling of being sidelined, of being pushed away by Marisol just when she thought she'd be needed the most. Despite her genuine concern for her friend, Lily felt like she had been shut out, left to wander aimlessly with her emotions running high.

With each step, her frustration only seemed to grow, fueled by the whispers of the spirits that surrounded her. Unbeknownst to Lily, her concern was slowly morphing into anger and jealousy, a toxic emotion that threatened to consume her from within.

Lost in her thoughts, Lily stumbled upon a figure standing in her path, a woman who bore a striking resemblance to Marisol. It took Lily a moment to realize that she was face to face with Nicole, Marisol's mother, and a legendary werewolf in her own right.

"Oh, I- I'm so sorry! I didn't see you there." Lily apologized immediately, realizing that she had inadvertently bumped into someone of great importance. "I'm sorry. I wasn't looking where I was going."

Nicole smiled warmly at Lily's flustered apology, "It's okay. It was a mistake. Are you Lily, by any chance?"

Lily's eyes widened at the mention of her name, disbelieving the fact that Marisol's mother would even be aware of her existence.

"Y- yes, I am." She stuttered out. "How do you know my name?"

Nicole sighed, her expression reflecting a mix of amusement and frustration. "Marisol has been talking about you non-stop. She asked me to seek you out. Since I've had nothing to do around this place anyway, and I can't even spend time with my own daughter, I decided to go in search of you."

Lily's jaw hung wide. "She... she mentioned me?"

Nicole raised a brow, "Of course, you're her closest friend in this place, aren't you?"

Lily nodded eagerly. She was full of emotion, so much so that her anger slowly melted into nothing, replaced with a sense of warmth and gratitude. The fact that Marisol had mentioned her to her own mother meant more to Lily than she could express.

Nicole took her hands, a grateful smile decorating her lips, "Thank you for being there for Marisol. It means a lot to her. And to me too. The fact that someone was there to look out for her when even her parents couldn't bring me so much relief, I can not thank you enough."

Lily's mind rewired immediately; a resurgence of affection for Marisol and a renewed sense of purpose filled her. She hadn't been forgotten after all, and now she felt a tinge of guilt at thinking Marisol's sense of relatedness so weak. She vowed to herself to continue to be there for her friend, even as an unseen supporter in the background.

"Would you like me to show you around?" Lily offered awkwardly, still a bit thrown off at being in the presence of a literal legend.

Before she could get an answer, though, a wave of energy swept through the air.

'Danger.' A warning follows immediately after, 'We are under attack. The east border has been breached.'

"What is it?" Nicole asked, expectant, and Lily regarded her with wide eyes.

"Rogues!" She cried, "Redwood is under attack. That means Guinevere is making her move."

Without another word, both women break into a sprint in the direction of the pack house, in search of Marisol.

The demons that had been whispering darkly into Lily's ears, fueling her negative emotions in a quest to fully infest her mind, hovered behind, resigned. Their master wouldn't be happy if they returned without a soul. The young lady had been the perfect target, and now they'd lost her. They needed something else, something better.

Somewhere within the pack house, Marisol sat cross-legged on the floor of Leticia's chamber, her eyes shut tightly as she focused on her breathing. Next to her, Leticia watched intently, guiding her through the meditation with gentle instructions.

"Focus, Marisol. Feel the energy coming to life within you. Embrace both sides and let them flow together as one. As you."

Marisol nodded, her brow furrowed in concentration as she attempted to merge the disparate energies within her. It was a challenging task, one that required her utmost focus and control.

Steadily, she tried to channel them both, coaxing completely different energies to accept her being a worthy vessel. On one side, she felt the primal essence of her wolf, fierce and warm. On the other hand, she sensed the ancient power that coursed through her veins, mysterious and potent.

For too long, these energies had remained separate, and to harness her full potential, she needed to merge them seamlessly.

With each inhale and exhale, Marisol sought to bridge the gap between these two aspects of herself. She visualized threads of energy intertwining, weaving together to form a harmonious whole. It was a delicate balance, requiring both focus and surrender.

Just as Marisol felt herself beginning to achieve a semblance of harmony between the two energies, the tranquility of the moment was shattered by the sudden sound of the door bursting open. Cedric stormed into the room, his expression urgent and panicked.

"Marisol, we're under rogue attack. We need to go, now!"

Marisol's eyes snapped open, her meditation broken by Cedric's abrupt entrance. She staggered to her feet, feeling disoriented and lightheaded from the sudden interruption.

Leticia, equally taken aback by the intrusion, rose to her feet as well. "Rogue attack? Where are they coming from?"

Cedric's jaw tensed, "They're Guinevere's rogues. They're breaching our borders and attacking in unprecedented numbers. We need to act fast."

"That's too sudden. What do they want?" Leticia probed further, and Cedric growled in frustration.

"I don't know, and right now, I don't care. However, we noticed that they were not targeting the residential areas. It's like they're deliberately avoiding them and remaining within the forest."

Leticia's eyes bulged as she connected the dots.

"It's a distraction." She gasped, shaking her head. "Guinevere is using the attack to draw our attention away from something else."

Marisol and Cedric exchanged skeptical glances, unsure of what to make of Leticia's theory.

"But what else could she be after?" Marisol asked, eyes narrowing as she tried to get a read on Leticia. For a while now, she'd begun to feel uneasy around the witch. She was almost certain that there was more to everything she revealed.

Leticia stroked her jaw in thought, "I'm not sure. Alpha Cedric, get your pack members to safety and withdraw your troops from the forest. If the rogues follow, then we'll be certain that I'm wrong. Marisol and I will stay here and try to gather more information."

Marisol furrowed her brows as soon as she saw Cedric's features morph into one of distaste. He was about to reject the idea, but she spoke before he could.

"She's right," Marisol said softly, facing Cedric and pressing a quick kiss on his cheek. "Go. Get your people to safety." She urged, "I'll be safe here, don't worry."

Cedric grumbled but turned to leave nonetheless.

As soon as they were alone once again, Marisol turned to face Leticia, her expression leaving no room for argument.

"Alright. Cut the crap. Enough with the pretense and mystery. What are you hiding?"