

Chapter 31 She Cried Wolf, Literally

The evening after she returned from her outing to the morning of the next day, went by in a blur.

After she woke up the next morning, all she could do was text Emily, go through some other files concerning her job, read a novel Peter had generously left her with, before she drifted off to sleep.

Roxanne's eyes opened by 11 pm. It was then she realized she had slept most of her afternoon and early hours of the evening away. She let out a long and annoyed groan as she sat up. Knowing herself, she knew that it would be difficult to get sleep, now that she was awake already.

As she sat up on her bed, she thought back to the events of the previous day. The second she stepped out of the car with Lancelot and Peter on Thursday was the last time she caught even a glimpse of him. Since she arrived, he had neither called for her, nor come anywhere close to her.

Roxanne rose up from the bed, planting her bare feet on the floor as she walked to the bathroom. She was going to wash her face, put on her slippers and go for a walk outside. She would give herself a tour around the mansion and even outside. Perhaps, it would help her fall asleep again.

She dried her face with a towel after she was convinced she had washed the sleep out of her eyes. When she stepped out of the bathroom, her eyes drifted to the digital clock on top of her bedside drawer. It was already 11:15pm. Who in their right senses went out for a "walk" by this time of the night? As she asked herself the question, she scoffed.

Only Roxanne Harvey of course. As she put on her slippers and tied her hair into a pony tail with a scrunchy she found on her dressing table, she adjusted her shirt and shorts on her body.

Deep down, she wished she would run into Lancelot on her small expedition. Although, she knew she would meet his cold eyes staring down at her. He would query her for being outside so late with his thick baritone that brought goose bumps to her skin. But, she wouldn't mind. At least, she would see him.

It was weird. How could two people live in the same building, under the same roof and not run into each other in two days?! Was this what it was like to live in a palace? Where all palace buildings this magnificent? Her mind wondered back to the apartment she shared with Emily. The two of them could not be at home without bumping into each other's faces. Even in times when they were not on speaking terms, there was something that always caused the two of them to meet. Then again, her apartment was nothing compared to this fortress of a mansion, she thought. She gripped the rail of the staircase as she took slow steps down.

Hell! Her whole apartment wasn't even there quarter of the room she had been given to stay in this palace.

That was the difference between him and her, she thought.

Once again, she was standing at the foot of the staircase. As she walked through the long corridor this time, she made sure to take note of all, or most of the pictures. Roxanne could not help but laugh when she saw one of Lancelot. He could not have been more than eighteen then. He was holding on to an award plaque and putting on a graduation gown and hat. He wasn't smiling though, it almost seemed as if he was bored with whatever ceremony he was in. Something in Roxanne's heart sparked. Had he always been like this?

However, there was no time to admire the picture any further because there were over seventy, if not even a hundred of them.

Roxanne walked alone through the corridor to the front doors of the mansion. She was surprised to see them wide open. They did not have to worry about security, she thought. Whoever was going to make it past these doors had to make it past the gates first, which seemed like an impossible task on its own, move past the security house that stood just around the gate, before reaching the door. And with the way she had seen the security guards, Roxanne doubted that was possible.

As she stepped into the cold of the night, the cold breeze swept past her skin. She stood outside and room deep breaths in and out, her head and hands rose up to the sky. She stood there to admire the crescent moon that illuminated the sky. Roxanne had never been one who cared much for astrology or astronomy, but now, there was something peculiar about the way the moon illuminated the flowers in the garden, even the ground that she walked on. It was different from night time in Manhattan.

It was quiet, serene, and peaceful. Three things that New York wasn't.

She continued to stroll, admiring the sculptures of different wolves planted on different corners of the palace. The way the trees danced to the rhythm of the wind, the faint sounds of birds chirping.

The farther she walked, the more the place seemed to entrap her. The breeze, the beautiful trees and flowers, the faint sounds of night birds chirping, everything called out to her. And Roxanne answered the call, going deeper and deeper into the darkness of the night with every step that she took.

When she took few steps into what appeared to be a forest with extremely large trees, she wondered what it was that she would find within it. Perhaps, the Dankworth palace had a hidden zoo in it. Or a place where treasures were buried. The thought excited her, Roxanne found herself giggling like a silly ten-year old.

Better still, the forest could be haunted! And she would have a night filled with adventure, something like Alice in Wonderland, or Peter Pan. Then when morning came, a silly fairy would erase her memory and it would be as though it never happened.

Roxanne heard her subconscious scold her.

"What are you, thirteen?"

To this, Roxanne only laughed softly. If there were ghosts in this forest, she did not need them hearing her laughter.

When she took two slow steps further, she heard the rustling of leaves, even as the wind continued to blow her pony tail back and forth. It had suddenly become very dark and cold, and she could barely see a thing.

It was only now she regretted walking into the dark without so much as a flashlight.

It was probably time for her to head back to the mansion. She had had enough adventure for one night, and she needed to try to get rest again.

The cold breeze blew over her again. Roxanne sighed and wrapped her arms around herself.

From where she stood, she looked around one more time.

That was when she heard it again, the rustling of dry leaves. This time, it wasn't as faint as before. It was though someone had stepped on it.

In that moment, a cold seemed to freeze her spine. There was somebody walking around her, and the person was not her. Her grip around herself tightened, the hairs on her body now stood in the cold of the night. She was not going to move, not yet, she would wait for whoever was here with her go show itself first.

What if it was a snake? No. She shook her head at the thought, even as her heart hammered against her chest.

Roxanne was frightened. She was scared of breathing too quickly, or too loudly. She did not want her unwanted company getting a sense of where she stood.

Not until she was sure who... Or what it was.

It was at that moment, just when she had come to that faithful conclusion that she heard something growl behind her.

Her eyes flew open in fear, her hands gripped the collar of her shirt. She shut her eyelids, very tight.

This was all in her head, all in her wild imagination. She tried to convince herself.

There was no way she could have just heard an animal growl from behind her, absolutely no way.

Standing still, she heard the growl again. This time, it was so close that she felt the warm breath on her neck.

Roxanne found it difficult to swallow her own saliva. With her heart threatening to jump out of her chest, she turned slowly, towards the direction of the sound.

When she completed her turn...

Blood drained from her face completely.

Her eyes came face to face with dark ones, but these were not the eyes of a human.

As she stood there, in shock, her eyes moved over the animal. Piercing dark eyes, thick black fur, tall limbs and extremely sharp teeth sticking out of its mouth, it towered above her, looking down at her. She would have thought it to be a dog, but the height and size told her it wasn't.

She blinked twice in disbelief.

Roxanne found it hard to breathe, fear had numbed her, kept her fixed to a spot.

Was she, was she really looking at a...

The black furred beast charged towards her.

"Wolf!" she screamed, staggering backwards without caution. Her back collided with the rock hard floor, her head hit the ground with a loud thud.

As she screamed, the beast's growl grew louder, angrier.

"Help! Somebody!" she cried out, tears flowing freely down her eyes. She tried to stand up and run, but her muscles and joints all failed her.

The hit to her head was severe, but the beast was still charging towards her. She crawled helplessly, with tears in her eyes. The beast was faster, with every two steps she took, it covered it with one.

It was so close to her now, it gnarled, the mouth wide open, exposing its vicious teeth.

Roxanne couldn't move anymore, her breath failed her, she was shivering, her whole body vibrating with an intensity that did not leave space for breathing.

Just then, when she thought she was going to lose her right leg to the beast, she heard an angry howl from her back. The floor beneath her vibrated as another beast ran towards her.

Right in front of her horror filled eyes, a grey wolf jumped over her feeble frame. Landing in front of her, towering above the black one, hence blocking their paths.

She was not looking at one dreadful wolf anymore, but two.

It was more than she could take.

With her shortness of breath, the shock that froze her limbs, and the pain in her back and head, Roxanne felt herself drift away slowly.

Until all that rested on her was a thick blanket of darkness.