

## **Cried Wolf 16**

### Chapter 16

'Alpha, you look tired.

May I suggest you rest for the night?' Alice says. I nod, making my way to my room. Everything in my room sways. I grab onto the armchair and sit down. Kicking my shoes off, I wait for the swaying to stop. My door creaks open.

'Is someone there?' I ask, squinting at the figure I can barely make out.

'It's me! She says.

'Astrid? Is that you?' | ask and try to stand, but my balance is off. I feel a hand gently press against my chest.

'Sit down, Ryker. I'm here now. I'll take care of you, she whispers. She straddles herself on my lap.

'Astrid, you came back.'

'Of course, I did, she whispers as she slowly unbuttons my shirt.

'Why did you leave? Where did you go?' | ask.

All that matters is that I'm here with you.'

One hand caresses my bare chest, while her other unfastens my belt. Her lips brush across mine.

'Ryker,' she whispers lustfully, placing my hands on either side of her thighs.

'Astrid, I whisper.

'I want you to mark me, Ryker, she whispers.

Everything spins and sways, and I'm in an absolute stupor. All I can think of is making love to her.

I'm going to mark you first, she whispers seductively in my ear. Her teeth protrude and scrape the skin on my neck. I feel the pressure as she is about to puncture my neck. But, wait. Astrid can't shift yet. She can't mark me yet. Where's our usual heat? Sparks? I quickly push the person off of me.

'Alpha! What's wrong?' She asks.

'Vanessa?' | ask, squinting to adjust my sight.

'No, it's Astrid,' she says.

I try to stand.

'Vanessa! Astrid hasn't had her first shift yet. She can't mark me even if she wanted to!' | yell in anger and fall to the ground.

'What have you done to me?' I yell.

'Ryker, please! Astrid is not coming back. I'm doing you and the pack a favour!' She yells. I try to mind-link Leon and Kane, but I can't connect.

'Did you poison me?' I ask.

'Not exactly, she says. I try to crawl towards my door. But, unfortunately, I'm about to lose consciousness and fall into darkness before getting to it.

'He is too heavy, mum. We can't even roll him, Vanessa says. I squint, letting my eyes adjust. I haven't moved from my spot on the floor.

My head is pounding, and nausea creeps over me. I mind-link Leon and Kane for help. I'm still groggy but can see clearer.

'Quick, do it now, Vanessa!' Alice yells, shoving Vanessa toward me.

Vanessa straddles me and bares her fangs over my neck. I want to push her off, but Alice hits me across the head with a heavy object. Her fangs caress my nape when Leon and Kane barge in and pull her off me.

'Alpha! Are you okay?' Kane asks.

'They drugged me! Vanessa almost marked me,' I yell, angered.

'You have waited too long for your Luna. Vanessa would be a more fitting Luna than that wretched little bitch Astrid!' Alice yells.

Standing, I lean against the wall for support.

'Bring Alice to me now!' I snap. Leon has Alice's arms behind her back and pushes her toward me. I grip her neck tightly with my hand

'What did you do to Astrid? Where is she?' I yell. Alice struggles to breathe but forces a smile at my words. I squeeze her neck tighter.

'I will kill you right now if you do not tell me!' I warn.

She struggles for breath and gives a slight nod. I release my grip-enough for her to speak.

'The morning she disappeared, she came into the kitchen for something to eat. No one else was up yet. I told Astrid to save herself the heartbreak of the elders choosing Vanessa over her and to leave and that if she refused to leave, I would kill her anyway before her first shift.'

My wolf growls ferociously in her face. I'm struggling to control my wolf. As much as I want to see Alice dead, killing Alice won't bring Astrid back. I throw her across the room.

'Kane! Leon! Take them both to the cells, where they will stay!' I yell. I sit back in the armchair.

Leon and Kane return a short while later with a jug of water and a glass. They place them on the table next to me.

'Alice must have drugged my food. I felt dizzy after eating it. I couldn't even stand up straight. Vanessa pretended to be

Astrid, and she seduced me. She wanted to mark me,' | explain. Leon and Kane look at each other with worry.

"Alpha, rest in bed today until it wears off, Kane says.

'No, we need to find Astrid! Have any of you heard from Seth?' | ask.

'No. We'll go into the city. We'll take over from him. You won't be much help, Alpha, in your condition, Leon says.

Sculling two large glasses of water, I stand.

I'm fine,' I say, only to fall back into the armchair.

'Come on, Alpha, Leon says, grabbing one arm and Kane the other, lifting me over to my bed.

'Rest Alpha. We'll mind-link you the moment we hear anything or find her. I'll have Hayley and Mia check on you throughout the day. Mind-link them if you need anything, Kane says. They leave, and not long after that, I'm asleep.

I wake that afternoon and mind-link them. 'Any progress?' ask. 'I don't know how to tell you this, Alpha, but we haven't been able to mind-link Seth or find him. He has gone awol, Kane links.

Attempting to mind-link Seth myself, nothing happens. Something must have happened to him, he wouldn't just disappear. He would have mind-linked us. I link Kane and Leon. Keep searching for them both, keep trying to mind-link

Seth. I will be in the city soon. And yes, I'm feeling much better, so I will be of use.

We spent all night searching for Astrid and Seth. I don't understand. Astrid has vanished without a trace, and now Seth? What if someone is involved in their disappearance? Who? There are only two nights until Astrid shifts. I need to find her now.

Returning home, I want to feel as close to Astrid as possible. So, I go into her room and look around. Her scent is overpowering on the couch.

Wanting to be close to Astrid, I lie on the couch, and a few thoughts cross my mind. Astrid has been sleeping here instead of in her bed. It smells like vanilla and cookies. It explains why her bed looks as fresh as the day she got here. So why wouldn't she sleep in the bed?

Drifting off to sleep on the couch, I dream of Astrid. I kiss her lips and look into her beautiful green eyes.

'Astrid, my mate. I have been blessed the Moon Goddess chose us to be together, I say.

'Ryker, I want to be by your side forever,' she whispers, looking into my eyes. Then, before we can kiss, she disappears from my arms. 'Astrid! Wait! Come back! Astrid!' I sit upright on the couch and look around the quiet room.

It was just a dream. I stare at the floor, finding a business

card. Zenith Creations. We were near that building yesterday! Why would Astrid be at Zenith Creations? How does she even know Alpha Zenith? That pack has always been bad news! | mind-link Kane and

Leon. 'Get the car ready. I think I know where Astrid is!' I put the card in my pocket. Walking outside, get in the car.

'Where are we going?' Kane asks.

'Zenith Creations, I say. Kane and Leon give each other a look.

'What has Alpha Zenith got to do with Astrid?' Kane asks.

'We're about to find out, I reply.

## Chapter 17

Astrid

'Astrid, you need to eat, James says. Ignoring him, I keep my eyes on the stone floor. This will be my second night down in the cell. I've refused all food and never acknowledged James' s presence when he comes down to the cell.

He punches the cell door angrily. I flinch in fright. I'm worried.

'Damn it, Astrid! Why can't you be a good little mate and do what you're told?' He yells.

Hearing keys, James unlocks the cell. It creaks open. James picks me up and sits down on the bench, holding me tightly in his lap. I try to fight him off. I scratch his cheek. He slaps me hard across the face and wraps his arms tightly around me so I can't move. His nose nuzzles my hair and sniffs the back of my neck

'Astrid, I could make you so happy if you let me,' he says.

'You will never think of Alpha Ryker again if you give me a chance, he whispers. I wriggle and squirm.

'After your first shift, I will mark you straight away, he says. I stiffen at his words.

'No, I won't let you. You can't mark me. I belong with Ryker.'

'You may not like the thought of it now, but you will learn to love me,' he says.

'I will never love you, James! So, you better start getting that into your thick head!' I yell.

'Finally! You speak, he says with a chuckle. 'Two more nights, and your wolf will be here. Perhaps I'll watch your first shift. Hmm?' he says.

I'd rather you go jump off a cliff!' I say.

'Now, now,' he says, moving my hair away from my shoulder. He plants kisses along my shoulder.

'Stop!' I yell and squirm. James lets out a sigh and places me on the stone bench.

'I will be back tomorrow to spend some more bonding time with you, he smiles.

I cross my arms in disapproval as he leaves the cell and locks the door.

'Goodnight, Astrid.' he says, walking away. I lie down facing the cell door, cradling myself. I have to get out of here.

A few hours later, Amelia tiptoes softly downstairs. She lets out a sigh of relief when she sees James hasn't marked me yet.

'Alpha Zenith is going back into the city tomorrow for business. James and John will also be going. I'll look for the

cell keys. I'll get you out of here, she says with a smile.

Nodding, I'm hoping her plan works. Through the gaps of the bars, I take her hand.

'Come with me!' I offer. Amelia looks taken back.

'I can't leave. John and Zenith will hunt me down, she says sadly, looking away.

'Let them! Alpha Ryker and my pack will protect you,' I assure her.

'I don't know if I could leave all the other pack members.' She cries, 'I'd never be able to return and could never see them again.

'At least think about it until you find the key,' I suggest. Amelia nods and gives me a small smile, leaves the cell, and retreats upstairs.

Tired, I curl up on the cold bench and hug myself to keep warm. I'm playing hide and seek in the woods with mum. She has long brown hair and green eyes. I watch her run through the trees. 'Come on, Astrid, darling. It's your turn to find me,' she says. Closing my eyes, I count to thirty. My mum is quick on her feet and can run twice as fast as anyone I know. My mother is so strong and very kind. I admire her strengths. She is the most loving mother I could ask for. She always tells me how special I am, I never believe her. I figure mum is being biased because I'm her daughter. 'When you're eighteen, you'll believe me,' she says, smiling at me..

Slowly, I wander through the trees, searching for her. I see rustling in the distance up ahead. 'Found you!' I shout. I run toward the rustling, only to hear a growl. I freeze in place, slowly stepping backwards in fear. Panic fills my body. I see movement in my peripheral vision. Mum has her index finger over her lips, motioning for me to keep quiet. I'm shaking with fear. Mum points behind me.

Turning around, I tiptoe into the shrubbery she points to. I lie still, I'm flat on my tummy, with both hands over my mouth to conceal the sounds of my breathing. A vast grey wolf wanders around, sniffing, it lets out a loud growl.

For a moment, I closed my eyes. I can hear the wolf walking toward me. I open my eyes. My mother has a look of fear on her face. She slowly shakes her head and holds eye contact with me, motioning for me not to move. The big grey wolf slowly walks past me. He is ragged and worn and is even missing one of his ears. I've never seen such a ferocious animal. I tremble where I lie.

The wolf sniffs around before emitting a vicious, blood curdling growl. I scream in fear. The wolf turns, spotting me. I quickly stand and start running. The wolf gives chase until I hear my mother yell, 'It's me you want!' The wolf stops chasing me and runs toward my mother. Astrid! Run!' She screams. I don't

want to leave her. I run a small distance and climb a tree. My mother's body lies limp. I can see blood pooling

beside her. 'Mum!' I scream at the top of my lungs, crying. The wolf circles her. The wolf has blood on his face from my mother's wounds.

My Dad is yelling in the distance, 'Astrid!'

'Daddy!' I scream. The wolf looks right at me. I'm terrified. He walks toward me like I'm his prey until the sound of a gunshot rings out. Bang! The wolf retreats.

'Astrid?' My Dad calls out again, this time much closer. Another shot rings out. Bang!

'Dad! Over here!' I scream. The wolf turns and runs, knowing Dad is approaching. When the wolf is gone, I climb down the tree.

'Astrid! What's wrong? I heard your screams. Where is your mother?' he asks, in a panic.

'W-wolf... wolf... wolf...', I cry, shaking in fear and sobbing.

'A wolf?' Dad asks. I point in mum's direction.

'The wolf got her, Dad,' I say, bursting into tears.

Dad's face pales. He grabs my hand, and we wander cautiously toward my mother's body. Dad drops to his knees, lifts her head to his chest, and cries. 'My love! My beautiful love!' He cries, I crawl over to my mother, take her hand, and hold it up to my face. I cry into her hand. We stay like this for a while until Dad says something.

Astrid, you need to tell me exactly what happened, he says firmly.

'We were playing hide and seek. It was my turn to find her. I thought I had found her, but it wasn't her. It was a wolf. He growled and came out from behind the trees. Mum wanted me to hide in the shrubs. Even though I was so scared, I stayed as still as possible, but the wolf came close and scared me again with an angry, loud growl. I didn't mean to scream, Daddy. The wolf chased me, and I ran. Mum yelled out at the wolf. She said it was her the wolf wanted. She screamed for me to keep running. When I turned, the wolf was hurting her. So, I ran to that tree and climbed it. Then I screamed, and you came here, I say, crying. I look at Dad. I've never seen him look at me that way before. It's a look of pure hatred.

'Daddy?' I say, crying. Dad grabs me by the hair and drags me back toward our house.

'Daddy, Daddy. What are you doing? Why are you hurting me?' |  
yell.

'It's your fault she is dead! It's your fault the wolf killed her! If you listened to her, obeyed her and stayed still, she would still be alive; he yells. 'Daddy, please! I didn't mean to kill her! Please! I didn't mean to!' I'm dragged upstairs to my room and thrown inside. My Dad slams my door closed, and for the first time, I hear a key locking the door.

Mum!' I scream, sitting up drenched in sweat. I look around

the cell and let my eyes adjust. My breathing is heavy, and my heart races with panic. It was just a dream, the same dream I always have. Huddled in the corner of the dirty cell, I rest my chin on my knees. I jerk my head up when I feel a presence.

‘Who’s there?’ I ask, sniffing. Footsteps come closer. Alpha Zenith has a grin on his face. I glare at him.

‘What do you want?’ I yell.

‘You know very well what I want, he snaps back.

‘I’m not letting James mark me. I sure as hell won’t be his mate!’ I yell. His grin changes into a glare.

‘Do you know, you were screaming out for your mother before you woke up?’ He says. I look at the ground.

‘What happened to her?’ He asks.

‘None of your damn business!’ I yell.

‘What if I told you, I already know?’ He says, grinning again. I look at him, confused.

‘What would you say if I said I knew your mother?’ He asks.

I don’t believe you, I say, looking away again.

He laughs, drags an old rickety chair in front of my cell door, and sits

‘Well, aren’t you in for a big surprise?’ He says with a smirk

and crosses his arms.