

Cried Wolf 18

Chapter 18

Alpha Zenith

I'm going to tell you a story, Astrid. And you're going to listen to every word, he says. I glare at him but give him my full attention because I know he can make me listen if he has to, and I've been through enough.

'Twenty-two years ago, Moonstone Crest was the strongest pack around. They hosted an annual mating ceremony, where packs would be invited from all around the world to potentially find their mates.'

'Unexpectedly, my pack, Shady Crest, had been invited. Unfortunately, my father was the Alpha and did not get along with the Alpha of Moonstone Crest. My father was willing to put his hatred for Alpha Bane aside, though, as he hoped I'd find my mate there. I could finally take over as Alpha if I did.

'We attended the mating ceremony, and it was a spectacular event. However, not long after arriving, I smelled the most alluring scent I had ever smelled before – vanilla and honey. I followed the scent to no avail. I didn't understand why my mate's scent kept disappearing. Surely, she could smell my scent too, which would make her follow me.'

'Confused, I told my father I could smell my mate but couldn't find her. We spent most of the night searching for her. The scent finally led me to the front of the Moonstone Crest

packhouse. I looked up to see the most beautiful girl I have ever seen looking out the window. She is frightened when she sees me. 'Please! Wait!' I yell as she backs away from the window. She slowly re-approaches the windowsill, and we stare into each other's eyes.

The world vanishes. It's as though only she and I exist. Nothing else matters. 'Mate', we both say. Our eyes turn black, then silver for a moment, and go back to our standard colours. 'Please come down, so we can meet properly,' I say, smiling. She shakes her head no. 'I'm sorry, I can't, she says in her sweet voice. I give her a confused look. 'But we're mates! Surely you can come down so we can talk? And maybe have a dance?'

'Her beautiful green eyes were like emeralds and her long brown hair blows in the wind. 'You don't understand. Mate bond or not, my father would never let me be with the future Alpha of Shady Crest.' She cries.

'Confused with her words, I ask her, what's wrong with being the future Luna of Shady Crest? She tells me: 'your father has tarnished the pack's name with his wicked ways and his treatment of his pack. He kidnaps and hunts humans for sport, she says.'

'Why should my father's ways affect us?' I ask, becoming angry. 'My father will make me reject you regardless of how good or bad your heart is. I'm sorry, she explains, tearfully.'

'We can figure this out, my love! But, please, just come down. I will speak to your father and tell him and show him I will treat you like a Queen, I beg her. She continues to wipe tears from her face and shake her head.

'If you won't come down here, I will come up there!' I tell her, breaking the front door down. I run upstairs and push her bedroom door open. I march over to her, but she has so much sadness in her eyes.

'Leaning over her, I hold her chin in my hand. The chemistry between us is magical. I lean my head down to brush my lips against hers. I cup her face in my hands, and she places her hands on my chest.'

'Our lips meld together with intense passion. It feels so right and so good. Our lips finally part, and she bursts into tears. 'My sweet love, who is your father?' | ask. She looks away. 'Alpha Bane of Moonstone Crest, she whispers.

'In shock, I take a step back. 'You're Alyssa, the daughter of Alpha Bane?' I say. She looks up into my eyes and nods. I pull her into my chest, letting her cry. I stroke her hair to comfort her.

'Our fathers are the greatest of enemies. There has to be a way for us to be together, I say. 'Come, Alyssa, take my hand. Let us go to the dance. If everyone sees us happy together, maybe our fathers will approve of us. We need to try at least, my love, I say

Alyssa nods. We smile at each other and walk hand in hand to the dance. All eyes are on us, in shock, as we walk in. Everyone stares, not expecting us to be matched by the Moon Goddess. We dance among the others as sparks fly between us. Alyssa's smile brightens the room. We stare lovingly into each other's eyes.

'What is the meaning of this? Get away from my daughter now!' Alpha Bane yells across the room. Everyone gasps and stands aside to let Alpha Bane through. Alyssa clings to my coat and looks up at me. Her beautiful green eyes well with tears.

'Alpha Bane, it's a pleasure to meet you, I say, most respectfully, bowing my head. 'Alyssa, come here now! He snaps. 'Dad, it's okay. Zenith is my mate,' she says with a nervous smile for her dad!

'Alpha Bane's face pales instantly. 'No. The Moon Goddess would not be so cruel to mate my precious daughter with the lowest pack. You're the most hated pack in the world,' he yells.'

I stiffen at his words. Alpha Bane, please. I can assure you Alyssa is my mate, and I'm so honoured to accept her as my mate. I know you and my father don't see eye to eye, but-'I'm

interrupted

"See eye to eye? Your father murders humans for fun! The man beats his pack members. He is the only Alpha known to keep

pack members as slaves. He is sick and twisted, Alpha Bane

yells.'

‘Enough!’ My Dad yells and steps forward, out of the crowd. He looks at Alyssa, clinging to me with tears in her eyes, with my arm around her waist, clasping her tight. My Dad chuckles at the situation.’

‘Who would have thought? My son, blessed with your daughter,’ he chuckles. ‘The Moon Goddess must surely hate you, Alpha Bane, to make you share grand-pups with me!’ Dad chuckles.

‘Dad. This mateship is a blessing for Alyssa and me. You need to keep your taunts to yourself!’ I yell at him. My Dad growls at me for disrespecting him in front of all the packs.’

‘Alyssa! You are to reject Zenith right now!’ Alpha Bane orders. Alyssa and I both flinch at his demand. We stare into each other’s eyes. I shake my head no. I plead with Alyssa not to do

‘She doesn’t want to reject me. She wants to accept me. ‘Now! Alpha Bane yells, making her jump. ‘You wouldn’t dare make her reject my son!’ My father yells at Alpha Bane, Alpha Bane grabs Alyssa by the wrist and pulls her to him, ‘Alyssa, you listen to me now. You deserve better. You deserve to be with the best Alpha out there! Do you think you will have a happy life in that packhouse?’ He yells:

‘He forcefully turns Alyssa around by her arms. ‘Do it now, or everyone will know you as a traitor to this family. Do you want your mother living with that reputation?’ Alyssa is crying. She shakes her head no.’

‘Forgive me, Zenith. Please forgive me. I, Alyssa Moonstone, reject you, future Alpha Zenith of Shady Crest as my mate.’ I’m crippled with severe pain in my chest. It feels like she has ripped my heart out. I see Alyssa in the same pain, gripping her chest. Everyone gasps and watches on in horror. Rejecting mates is extremely rare. Most would never witness a rejection in their lifetime.’

‘The mating ceremony is over! Everyone, go home!’ Alpha Bane yells. He still has his hands around Alyssa. He is pulling her away toward the packhouse. I want to run to her, but my father grabs me and holds me back.’

‘You will pay for this, Alpha Bane! I swear to the Moon Goddess, you will pay!’ I yell.

‘Four months pass. My father and I organise our warriors to wipe out the Moonstone pack so I can free Alyssa and bring her home with me where she belongs. We have it all planned out. We would trespass onto Moonstone Crest the night of Alpha Bane’s birthday celebrations, discreetly killing guards and warriors one by one. The celebrations would be in the great hall where the mating ceremony was held. Once I found Alyssa, I would lure her away from the hall. My warriors would close all the doors to the hall, barricading them in. The

warriors would pour fuel outside the hall, block the doors, and then ignite a fire.

Chapter 19

Alpha Zenith

‘The moment I see Alyssa, my heart races. I watch her for a while and notice she doesn’t seem sad or depressed. Not the way I have been, every moment I’ve been away from her. She laughs and dances with everyone, she even clings to her Dad’s arm, kissing him on his cheek. I don’t understand. Why isn’t she upset or angry at him? Why does she look so happy? | thought there had to be a good explanation.’

'Alyssa walks over to the food table, plucks some grapes and strawberries from a fruit bowl, and eats them. 'Alyssa', I whisper. She stops herself from reaching for another

strawberry and looks around. 'Alyssa', I whisper again.

'She looks around to see me hiding in the garden. Her lips part as she lets out a small gasp. She is shocked to see me. She scans her surroundings to see if anyone is watching her, then looks back at me. I gesture for her to walk over to me. She is very hesitant and is debating whether or not to approach me.'

'She bites her lip and gives me a small nod to say she will come to me. Then, she looks around again and discreetly leaves the hall. My warriors watch me from their hiding spots, waiting for the signal to shut and seal the doors to set the hall alight:

"As soon as Alyssa approaches, I pull her into my chest and

hold her tight. Although I can't feel the sparks or the bond because of the rejection, I don't mind. The Moon Goddess gave her to me, and I knew I would always love her, no matter what.

'Zenith, what are you doing here?' She asks, pushing me away.

'I'm here to save you. I will take you away from here to be my mate and my Luna.' I smile. Alyssa takes a step back.

"Zenith... I don't know what to say. I don't know how to tell you... she says with sadness.'

'You don't have to thank me, Alyssa. We can be together! Your father can never stop us this way, I say, smiling down at her. She looks at me, confused. 'Zenith, I rejected you. We can't be together. I need you to understand that. I'm to be mated with Alpha Axton from the Justice pack in a few days,' she says. Angry at her words, I let out a growl. 'No, mate of mine will be mated to another wolf.' My wolf is angry and is trying to shift. My eyes are black from her words.'

'Zenith, we no longer have the bond. It would be best if you moved on for your family's sake and your sake. I like Alpha Axton. My father thinks they will be the next strongest pack. My family wants me to be with him. I also want to be with Alpha Axton, she says.'

'No!' I say firmly. Alyssa flinches and stares into my wolf's eyes. She steps backwards, and her eyes water. I can sense

she is about to run. I signal the warriors to shut and seal the doors. But before she can run, I throw her over my shoulder. 'You're coming home with me where you belong!' I say. Screams erupt from the hall. Pack members bang on the doors in need of escape.'

'Alyssa screams in horror when she realises what I'm doing. She kicks and punches with all her might until I drop her to the ground. She tries to run to the hall to open the door to free everyone. Grabbing her again, I hold her tightly in my arms. I sit a distance away from the hall, but close enough to feel the heat radiating from the flames. I hold her in my lap and stroke her hair. She cries and screams. I tell her we can be together, and I'll make a new hall for her at Shady Crest.'

'The screams stop, and the hall collapses-smoke billows around us. My father approaches, smiles, and looks down at Alyssa, who is distressed. 'Welcome to the family, sweetheart, Dad says. Alyssa spits at him. He slaps her across the face. I let go of Alyssa and stand. 'Never slap my mate!' I yell at him. He

smirks and looks past my shoulder. Alyssa stands there shaking in anger. 'You! You killed my father!' She screams, 'You murdered my entire pack!

'She punches my chest over and over in anger. 'I hate you!! hate you! I hate you! She screams. 'My father was only trying to protect me from men like your father!' She yells. I'm not like my father, I say, in shock.'

'You just let my father and an innocent pack burn! Children!

Mothers! Fathers! Brothers! Sisters! You murdered them all! You are worse than your father! She screams. My heart sinks at the truth in her words.'

'Alyssa. It's not meant to be like this,' I say. 'I will never be your mate, Zenith. Not now, never. You've murdered my family and my pack! I'm leaving, and I'm going to be with Alpha Axton, She yells, crying.

'She shifts into her wolf and runs to the woods. Her wolf is enormous, with pure white, long fur. Almost the size of an Alpha wolf. Moonstone Crest is the only pack with pure white wolves. They're descendants of the Moon Goddess.

I'm angry, and I chase after her. I will find you, Alyssa, and you will be my mate! Or you can choose to die!' I yell before shifting into my wolf. Her wolf is faster than mine. I can't catch her. I let out a long, loud, heartbroken howl and returned to the warriors and to my father, who I'm furious with. It was his idea to kill the entire pack. I should not have listened to him. My Dad laughs. I'm growling and snapping at him.

'Wanting justice, I challenge him. The warriors' gasp, knowing a challenge is a fight to the death. My Dad accepts the challenge and shifts into his wolf. Being Alpha, he is larger than my wolf, but his age is his weakness and my advantage.'

'Lunging at my father, we roll, taking swipes at each other and biting into each other's flesh as soon as there is an opportunity to do so. Blood splatters onto the warriors as they watch on. Finally, I bite my father's throat and rip his head off.

'I immediately grow larger and come into my power, letting out a loud howl to announce myself as the new Alpha. I have many wounds. My Dad had bitten my ear off during the fight. I shift back into human form, with my ear mostly gone. I return to the packhouse as the new Alpha.'

'My search for Alyssa and her pack spans months and then years. In the meantime, I accept Alice as my chosen mate. She has a crush on me. We eventually have a daughter Vanessa, and two twin sons: James, followed by John.'

I'm a ruthless Alpha and often lose my temper. I never stop searching for Alyssa. Years later, I found out the Justice pack had been wiped out, with only the Luna, Alyssa, escaping. She is with-child, carrying Alpha Axton's baby. After being in two packs that were both wiped out, she wants to live amongst humans. She can't bear the thought of raising her baby in the werewolf world.

'She moves to the city, where she meets a human who falls deeply in love with her. They buy a house together near the woods. She loves nature, and being a wolf, she shifts secretly and goes for runs in the woods. Her human lover doesn't know what she and the baby truly are. He loves her so much, and her

daughter knows only him as her Dad. She wants her daughter to have a wolf-free life for as long as possible and protect her from the danger and brutality of the werewolf world. Once her daughter turns eighteen, shifting into a wolf is

inevitable. Just before her eighteenth birthday, Alyssa intends to tell her about her wolf DNA.

'When her daughter is around seven, and my sons are not much older, I find out where they live. The house emits sweet

giggles. I watch and wait in the woods until I hear Alyssa's voice. 'Come on, Astrid, darling. It's your turn to find me!' Although I can't see you, I know you're hiding somewhere. Sniffing around, I catch your scent. Maybe if I growl, I can scare you into moving, and it works. I knew chasing you would make her come out. 'It's me you want, she yells. She knew it was me. She knew I would never stop looking for her.'

'I run toward her and lunge at her. My teeth sink into her neck while I shake her around like a rag doll, and the colour fades from her face, and she becomes lifeless. Once I know, she is dead. I also consider killing you up in the tree until I hear the gunshots. I have achieved my goal, killing your mother for leaving me for Alpha Axton.'

I decide to monitor you over the years. I know your stepfather isn't treating you well. It makes me happy knowing it would have made your mother miserable.'

'My pack runs differently from other packs. I don't want to go along with the whole fated-mate shindig. Instead, I decide to match people with mates who increase the pack's strength. Vanessa, pretending to be a victim, goes to Shadow Crest with the mission to mark and mate Ryker, one of the strongest alphas around, besides me. Alice is stubborn, though, and

doesn't want to leave Vanessa. So, I send them both and keep in contact with them daily. Alice spends the odd night here, with Shadow Crest none-the-wiser.'

'Knowing you are of Moonstone Crest and Justice pack DNA means you are a powerful wolf with rare genes and likely a pure white wolf who would breed strong pups with my son. Amelia is an Alpha's daughter too, mixed with a secret gene that only her family and I know about, who, with a substantial dowry, handed her over to be mated with John.

'Love no longer matters. It doesn't matter if the Moon Goddess gives you a mate. There is always a chance you'll be rejected and left for someone else, regardless of how strong the bond is! I learned power is stronger than love that night.'

'That's what I taught my pack: it's less heart-breaking to choose a mate who will benefit you and the pack, and a fated mate's rejection is gut-wrenching.'

'My kids agreed. I killed the boy's fated mates. They were weak Omegas. Can you believe that? Omegas matched to future alphas! I killed Vanessa's mate, too. He was the weakest wolf I had ever seen: more mutt than wolf. And now, here you are, the day before your eighteenth birthday, about to be marked with my eldest son. How did it go? Oh, yes. 'Welcome to the family, sweetheart, Alpha Zenith says with a sadistic smile.

Chapter 20

Astrid

In utter shock, I can't believe what Alpha Zenith has just told me. He is my mother's true mate and murderer. I stand, run to the cell door, and shake the bars with fury full of anger.

'You killed my mother! You killed her!' I yell. Alpha Zenith smiles.

'Yes, I killed her! After everything, I did for her! I gave her a chance to reunite with me, and she threw it away like I was nothing, like I wasn't even worth the risk!' He yells.

'You killed her whole family! You murdered them all in cold blood! She didn't want to be with a monster!' I yell. The look on Alpha Zenith's face changes from a smile to aggression. He unlocks the cell door and grabs me by the throat, holding me against the cold stone wall.

'What did you call me?' He growls, squeezing my throat tighter. I try to loosen his hands from my throat. I can't breathe. Black dots appear in my vision, and he loosens his grip and speaks.

Call me a monster again, Astrid, he warns. Boring his eyes with mine, I know he will kill me if I call him anything again. I shake my head in defeat.

'That's what I thought, he says, dropping me to the ground.

Tears stain my face, and I'm gasping for oxygen.

'Pathetic!' He says, staring down at me, before smirking and walking away.

I feel like I will explode. A cocktail of emotions swarms through me with all this new information about my mother, my father and the pack I come from. I stand, grab the sides of my head, and let out the loudest, most frustrated scream. James comes running down the stairs.

'Astrid! What's wrong?' He asks, concerned.

'What's wrong? What's wrong?' I repeat, in disbelief, at his dumb question. I'm locked in a cold, dirty cell, forced to be your mate! Your father murdered my mother! He wiped out her whole pack! I want to be with Ryker, where I am supposed to be! And you dare to ask me what is wrong?' I yell. James looks away.

'Did you know your father killed my mother? Did you know he murdered an entire pack?' I yell. James looks at me in silence

for a moment.

'Yes, I know. The whole pack knows. Most pack members are afraid to disobey him. They know he'll kill them in the blink of an eye. They all know you're Alyssa Moonstone's daughter, the only werewolf left from Moonstone Crest. Why do you think everyone was so excited to meet you when you arrived?' He asks.

'I hate you,' I say in a low voice. James stiffens and glares at me.

'Look, I need to help Dad in the office today. I will come to see you when I return, he says.

I'd prefer you never come near me again,' I retort.

James crosses his arms in anger and goes upstairs. Hour's pass. I'm guessing it's late afternoon. It's hard to tell with no windows down here. I wonder if Amelia had any luck finding the cell key. For self-entertainment, I throw small stones between the bars of the cell door, missing half the time.

Suddenly, I hear yelling and cries. Light appears on the stairs as the door opens. Someone shoves Amelia down the stairs. She cries out as she stumbles and falls.

'Please, John, I'm sorry!' She says.

Don't waste your apologies on me! Save them for the Alpha! John yells. He stomps heavily across the stone floor, grabbing Amelia by the hair and dragging her into the cell next to mine. He throws her in and slams the cell door shut.

'Amelia!' I shout. We look at each other. Her eyes are red and puffy from crying. She has a few minor bruises on her neck.

"Astrid, I'm sorry, she cries, looking away.

'I caught my little mate, Amelia here, rummaging through my father's things, and forced her to confess what she was

looking for, John says, smirking.

'You were supposed to be at work today!' Amelia yells at John.

'I was but came home early. We had some issues with Ryker from Shadow Crest, which we had to take care of. So dad sent me home to prepare the warriors. Just in case Ryker tries to break in and rescue his dear little Astrid, John says.

'Ryker is looking for me?' I ask excitedly. How did Ryker know to go to Zenith Creations? He must have found the business card. I left it in my room.

'Don't get too excited sweet cheeks, John says. "His beta, Seth and others found your scent in the city, but lost the trail. Seth broke into our underground car park after picking up your scent again. Pack warriors patrol at night. We caught Seth, as you know, and he has been in the basement ever since. We only let him out to interrogate him and rough him up a bit, John laughs.

'Wait! That guy you beat up the other day was Seth?" I ask, in shock.

'Sure was, he chuckles.

'You're a bastard! You know that, John?' I yelled, glaring at him.

'Yep, I know it, and I like it, John laughs.

'What has Alpha Zenith told Ryker?' I ask, needing more

information.

'Dad told him you begged him for temp work, to skip town, so we gave you work for a few days, paid you cash, and then you left.' he smiles.

'Did he believe it?' | ask.

'I don't know. Hence, James and I came back to the house to prepare, just in case he trespassed and searched for you and Seth. Anyway, I'm sure your soon-to-be mate, James, will come to see you shortly. Alpha Zenith should be back soon, too. I'm interested to see what Amelia's punishment is for trying to help you escape,' he says with a smirk.

John leaves Amelia and me, and I crawl over to her on my hands and knees on the stone floor and reach out to her. She is shaking and petrified, as am I.

'Amelia, look at me,' I whisper. Amelia slowly looks up at me with her pretty brown eyes.

'I won't let anything happen to you, okay?' I promise.

'Astrid, there is nothing you can do,' she says, wiping tears from her face.

'Ryker will save us, he is coming to save me. I just know it, and you will come home with us!' I say reassuringly.

I hope you're right, she sobs.

Moments later, Alpha Zenith enters the cells, dragging Seth down the stairs. A calico bag is over his head, and he isn't moving. Seth's wrists are tied together with rope.

'Seth!' I yell.

'Yell all you want. I knocked Seth out good!' Alpha Zenith laughs as he drags Seth to a cell opposite mine and throws . him in like a bag of potatoes.

'Why the hell are you in here, Amelia?' He growls. Amelia bursts into tears, frightened.

'Ah, fuck it. I've got more important shit to deal with right now,' Alpha Zenith snaps, stomping off.

Amelia and I stay huddled up, despite the bars between us. It must be nightfall when James comes down the steps. He unlocks my cell door, not saying a word, and gazes at me the whole time. Then, he pulls me away from Amelia.

'Don't touch me! Get your hands off me!' I yell, trying to slap his face. He pins my wrists between us, holding them tightly.

I wish I could mark you right now, Astrid, he whispers. Shuddering at his words, I recoil from him.

'I look forward to your first shift tomorrow night. Ever since Ryker showed up looking for you, I haven't been able to stop thinking of you. Thinking of him taking you from me is not good, he says,

'I belong with Alpha Ryker, not you! You'll be sorry when he finds me!' I yell. James glares and pushes me harshly against the bars.

'You are mine! And I'll claim you as mine after your first shift. I'll make sure you're bearing my pups by the end of the night! He growls.

'I will never mate with you. I would rather die than bear your pups!' I yell. James strikes my face, and I fall to the ground.

'Astrid!' Amelia cries out. James storms out of the cell, locking it behind him.

'I'm okay. I'm sorry you had to see that,' I say.

'Astrid, we need to get out of here!' Amelia cries.

'I know, I say, looking away. Seth sits up.

'Seth! Seth!' He raises his wrists to his face to take the calico bag off his head. He spends a few moments squinting before his eyes adjust.

'Astrid?' He wonders.

'Yes, it's me! Seth – I'm so glad you're awake. I was so worried!

'Where are we?' He is dizzy and disoriented.

'We're in the cells underneath the Shady Crest packhouse.'

'

'Who is that?' He asks, nodding to the cell next to mine.

'Amelia. She tried to help me escape, but she got caught. She is John's chosen mate,' I explain.

'Why would anyone have a chosen mate?' He asks.

'Alpha Zenith doesn't want his children or pack members to be with their true mates. So, he killed Vanessa, James' and John's mates. Alpha Zenith says they were weak omegas. He wants only high-ranking, powerful werewolves to produce pups with his kids. He wants them to breed stronger wolf pups to make the pack stronger. Amelia is the daughter of an alpha from another pack. He bought her to breed with John. He is trying to force me to mate with James after my first shift tomorrow night, I explain.

The look on Seth's face says it all.

'Astrid, you are Alpha Ryker's mate! You are my Luna! You can't mate with James!' He yells.

'We need to think of a way to escape before I shift. Otherwise, we have to hope Ryker saves us,' I say. Seth and Amelia nod in agreement. We spend the rest of the evening devising a plan but come up with nothing. Amelia tried to dig her way out, only to find disappointment and stone. Seth tried to bend the cell bars, to no avail. While I attempted to pick the lock with a bobby-pin, I took from Amelia's hair. We sit and stare at each other in defeat

'We can only hope that Ryker saves us, Seth says with dismay.