

Cried Wolf 21

Chapter 21

Alpha Ryker

We arrive in the city, park outside Zenith Creations, enter the facility, and find an elevator. The elevator door dings and opens. We step out and spot a large door and enter. It's quite a modern, sleek waiting room. It even has a water feature on one wall. I approach the large desk to see a blonde receptionist on the phone. Leaning on the desk, I tap my fingers impatiently. The receptionist raises a perfectly shaped brow at me. I take the phone from her and throw it behind her.

'Excuse me!' She says. 'That was a significant client on the phone!' She yells.

'I don't give a shit who was on the phone. Where's Zenith? | want to speak with him immediately!' I yell. She picks up a phone and presses a button.

'There is a vulgar man here, with two other men wanting to speak with you immediately, she says. She covers the mic on the phone with her nail-polished hand.

'What is your name?' She asks.

"Alpha Ryker, I snap.

"Alpha Ryker, sir, Yes, okay. I will send them in,' she tells Alpha Zenith. She puts the phone down and stands. 'Follow me, please, she says.

We're escorted to the middle door a few metres behind her desk. Alpha Zenith sits in an oversized chair behind a desk with two bodyguards.

'Alpha Ryker! What a surprise to see you here. Please, sit,' he says with a smile.

'No, we will stay standing. Where is she?' | ask.

'Where is who?' Zenith asks. Placing my hand in my pocket, I pull the card out and slam it onto his desk.

'My mate, Astrid. I know she is here. We can smell her scent!' Zenith pauses and stares at the business card.

'I found this card in her room after she ran, I say.

'Yes. Astrid was here, but only for a few days. She asked me for a few days' work to skip town. I didn't question her. She was a young girl who needed help, so I helped her and gave her a job, and she left, Zenith explains.

'You're lying,' I yell. Zenith puts his hands in the air.

'Look, believe me, or don't believe me, I don't care. I don't know why you're bothering to find Astrid if she doesn't want to be with you. Maybe you should let her be, he suggests.

'She only left because some of your old pack members threatened to kill her if she didn't!' | growl, Zenith has a poker face, and his two men give each other a look.

And which old members would they be?' Zenith asked.

'Alice and Vanessa. But not to worry: they're currently locked up awaiting punishment.' I notice the two men give each other another look, and then glare at me.

"And what will their punishment be?' Zenith asked calmly.

'I'll have them killed, and their heads ripped off for threatening my Luna and mate,' I say, lying. Zenith glares for a split second.

'I see,' he says, his fists clenched.

'I suppose you haven't seen my missing beta Seth either?' | | ask, expecting another denial. I can smell Seth's scent in the room. He has been here as well.

'No, we haven't, but I will let you know if Astrid contacts me if you like?' He says. I glare at him. He is the worst liar I have ever met.

I would appreciate that.

'Your beta and gamma?' I ask, looking at the two men.

'These are my sons: James, the future Alpha of Shady Crest and John, he says. James is glaring at me as though he despises me and wants to rip my head off. John is smirking.

'I'm sure we will see each other again soon,' I say, leaving Kane and Leon following behind. Out of the elevator, we go

straight to the car.

'He is lying,' I say.

'We figured as much, Kane says.

'I can smell Seth's scent. He has been there, I point out.

'What's our next move?' Leon asks.

'Let's get back home and make a plan. We will need all our warriors,' I say.

We arrive at Shadow Crest a short while later.

'Leon, get the maps of Shady Crest from the library. Kane, bring Mia and Hayley here.' They both nod and leave. Leon returns a short time later with a couple of scrolls he hands to

me.

'Alpha Ryker!' Mia says as she enters the room, Kane and Hayley behind her.

'Please tell me you found them, she says, hopeful. I shake my head.

'No, but I can confirm they were both at Zenith Creations. Their scents were faint but were there. Alpha Zenith denied seeing Seth but said Astrid worked for him for a few days before leaving with enough money to skip town. So, he has them. He's lying,

We gather around the table and roll out the map showing Shady Crest.

'I think they're in his house. They're not exactly going to let us have a look around. The only way in is if we trespass and declare war. The girls gasped.

'If we go to war, some of our pack members could die,' Hayley grabs Kane's arm tightly.

'No one has to die, I reassure her.

'How so?' Leon asks, confused.

'When we were in the office today, I mentioned Vanessa and Alice as the reason why Astrid fled. I told him they would be punished by death. Zenith tried to hide it, but he and his sons weren't happy about it. We need to find out why he doesn't want Alice and Vanessa harmed. Leon, take a few warriors with you and bring Alice and Vanessa here for questioning.' Leon nods and leaves the room.

Leon returns with warriors who are dragging Alice and Vanessa into the room. They sit them on a chair next to each other. Alice spits at my feet as I approach.

'That isn't very nice, Alice,' I say. She lets out a deranged laugh,

"You have to tell me, what are you to, Shady Crest? What are your rankings? | ask. Alice glares at me, remaining silent.

Vanessa stares into my eyes with sadness.

'Why couldn't you just love me as I loved you?' She cries. Kneeling in front of her, I lean in closer.

'What are you to, Alpha Zenith?' I ask, glaring at her. Vanessa recoils from me and looks away.

'You will answer me, or Mia will convince you to talk.' I motion for Mia to step forward, and she cracks her knuckles, giving Vanessa a death stare.

'I'm his daughter,' she confesses. I could have heard a pin drop.

'Vanessa!' Alice growls at her.

'You're Alpha Zenith's daughter? That makes Alice the Luna of Shady Crest! You said they abused you, that you were the pack slaves! Why did you come here if you're the Luna, and you're his daughter?' | ask, half questioning, half-wondering.

'Vanessa, keep your mouth shut!' Alice snaps.

'Leon, take Alice back to her cell,' I order. Once Alice is gone, I grab Vanessa by the chin.

'Tell me everything you know, now!' I demand.

My father, Alpha Zenith, sent me here to become Luna and bear your pups, But unfortunately, he killed my true mate. Dad said my mate was weak, and his children would only breed

with the best. Knowing you were mateless and one of the strongest alphas around, he told me to seek refuge here, with the intent of us sleeping together. The irony is, the moment I met you, I instantly had a crush on you. It was all too easy to fulfil Dad's wishes.'

'Do you know where Astrid is?' | ask. Vanessa looks away.

'Please, Vanessa. She's, my mate. I love her. Tell me, and your punishment will be lenient,' I compromise. Vanessa looks at me, my eyes are glassy.

I'm only going to tell you, Ryker, because I love you, and I want you to be happy, she says, tears rolling down her cheeks.

'She is at Shady Crest,' she confesses.

I knew it! Seth's there too!' I growl.

'Wait! There is something you should know. My brother James plans on marking her, and sleeping with her, tomorrow night after her shift, she says. Angry, I growl loudly at her words,

'No wonder he wanted to rip my head off when I saw him today, I ponder.

Kane, let's go over the map and work out the best strategy to defeat Zenith and his pack, Leon, you can get the warriors prepared. Then, tomorrow evening, it's war!' I declare.

Chapter 22

'Happy Birthday!' Amelia says as I wake.

'Happy Birthday, Luna!' Seth cheers. I can't help but laugh.

'Who would have thought I'd be celebrating my eighteenth in a cold, dirty cell?' I chuckle. Seth and Amelia laugh. We all go silent in thought

'Astrid?' Amelia says, concerned.

I'm terrified. I'm meeting my wolf tonight. What if Ryker doesn't save us in time? What if James marks me?' I worry.

'Let's see if I can mind-link Alpha Ryker. James and John injected wolfsbane into me. But unfortunately, it weakened me and hindered our connection, Seth says. We watch on as he concentrates, his eyes clouding over.

'Is it working?' | ask. Seth nods.

I've gotten through to Alpha Ryker!' He says. I run to my cell door, hold the bars, and partially squeeze my head through them.

'Seth, tell him I'm sorry. Tell Ryker I am so sorry. I should not have left. I didn't want to leave!' I yell desperately.

'Ryker says he knows. Vanessa confessed everything. Did you' know Alice poisoned him so Vanessa could mark him?' Seth

says. I gasp.

'Please tell me she didn't?' I panic.

'No, Kane and Leon were there just in time. They're both in the cells now. I relax with relief.

'He knows we're here. He will be here tonight with the warriors to free us,' he says.

'Please tell him I miss him, and I just want to be with him.

Seth nods.

'Um, he says he can't wait to hold you in his arms and taste your sweet lips, Seth blushes. I giggle and blush in response.

'So, I guess we just have to wait it out until tonight, I say. Seth nods. I can't help but smile and hug myself. I jump up and down and do a twirl.

'I'm going to see Ryker tonight!' I say with excitement. Seth and Amelia smile at seeing me so happy and excited.

My joy is short-lived when John and James come marching down the stairs, smirking. John unlocks Amelia's door and drags her out.

'No, John. Please! Where are you taking me?' Amelia cries.

'Let her go!' I shout.

Amelia kicks and punches John.

'Stop fighting me! Alpha Zenith is ready for you. The longer you make him wait, the more lashes you'll receive!' He snaps.

'Don't you dare touch her!' I yell.

'Or what?' John yells.

'I'll rip your head off the moment I shift if you lay a finger on her!' John glares at me.

'James, I think you need to put Astrid in her place!' He warns.

John is still dragging Amelia up the stairs as she continues kicking and screaming. James enters my cell and steps forward, and I step back until I'm up against the wall with nowhere else to go. He cups my cheek with his hand.

'Tonight, we become one, and you become mine!' He whispers in my ear. Then he presses his body against mine, pinning me against the wall, and kisses my neck. I try to fight him off, but he has my hands pinned above my head.

'Get off my Luna now!' Seth growls. James pauses with annoyance and turns to Seth.

"Astrid is my Luna and my mate! I will do as I please with her, so if I were you, I would shut your trap before I come in there and rip your head off!

James kisses my neck,

"Please! Stop!" I yell,

'Stop? We could skip waiting and mark each other now?' He says, dead serious. His fangs protrude, and he scrapes them across my shoulder. I kick him in the shin as hard as possible, and he steps back in pain. I punch him with full force, giving him a black eye.

'You little!' He snarls. I want to punch his face again, but he catches my fist in his hand, twists my arm behind my back, and locks me in a hold, so I can't move.

'You have become rather feisty, Astrid. You're not as weak as you used to be, but I can fix that!' He says, shoving me into the stone bench and locking the cell door behind me.

'Tonight, I won't be so lenient, Astrid. I suggest you get used to the idea of being my mate!' He yells as he walks upstairs.

'Astrid, are you okay?' Seth asks.

'I want to get out of here. I want to be with Ryker.'

'I know Luna, I know. I would do anything to have Mia in my arms right now, too, he says with a sad smile. John returns downstairs in a bad mood with a food tray. His face has deep scratches.

'Where's Amelia?' I yell. He drops the food tray on the ground, not caring that half of the food rolls off into the dirt.

'The little cow went psycho, scratching the shit out of my face and ran off, but we have pack warriors spread out everywhere

if Ryker shows up. So, it's only a matter of time till she's caught and brought back here.'

'We will see you tonight for your first shift, he says with a smile.

'Who are we?' | ask.

"Alpha Zenith, myself and your mate James," he says. I glare at him. 'It's getting dark. I will see you soon, he says, slinking off.

Seth and I look at each other in a comforting silence before the door creaks open and light shines in. Amelia is screaming. John drags her down the stairs and throws her into the cell next to mine.

'Amelia! Are you okay?' | ask. She nods.

'You're lucky, Ryker, and his warriors have entered our territory. Otherwise, you would get far worse than lashes, Amelia!' John yells.

'Ryker is here?' | ask.

'Yes, but not to worry. I have prepared our warriors for this,' he chuckles.

'If you hurt Ryker, I will kill you!' I scream.

'We will see, John says, walking away.

'Amelia, what happened? Are you hurt?' I ask. I wait for Amelia to catch her breath.

'They were going to give me twenty lashes. John tried to tie me up. I scratched his face as hard and as deep as I could. Then I shifted into my wolf and ran as fast as I could. There are pack warriors spread out all over the place. I hid for as long as I could to evade them. Two of them caught me. They brought me back here to be lashed, but Alpha Zenith says it will have to wait. They have spotted alpha Ryker and his men entering our territory, she says.

I'm glad you aren't hurt, Amelia. I'll mind-link Alpha Ryker and let him know that Alpha Zenith is aware he's here, Seth says. 'He says they've brought Alice and Vanessa with them, hoping to exchange them for us!

Suddenly, a surge of pain rips through my body. I cry out in pain and roll across the cold stone floor.

'Luna!' Seth yells.

'It hurts! It hurts! Make it stop!' I cry.

'Shit! You're shifting! Seth yells. Amelia reaches through the bars and places her hand on my back, trying to soothe me.

I've told Alpha Ryker to hurry and that you've started shifting, Seth says. I continue to cry out in pain.

'How long does this take?' I cry out.

'The first shift, on average, takes around half an hour,' he

replies. I let out another scream as the pain surges down my spine. It is horrendous.

'Ryker!' I scream.

Chapter 23

Alpha Ryker

We enter Shady Crest territory, right at nightfall. Vanessa and Alice walk in front of Kane with their wrists tied together while Leon leads the pack warriors. Alpha Zenith's warriors are all spread out, making them easy targets. Our arrival must have sounded an alarm. They retreat toward the packhouse.

'Alpha Zenith knows we're here,' I yell out. Seth is mind-links me: Alpha! 'They know you're here!'

'Good!' I say.

'Oh no!' Seth says.

'What is it?' | ask.

'It's Astrid! You need to hurry! She's shifting!' Seth says.

'Seth, tell Astrid I'm coming for her. I will be with her as soon as possible,' I say.

'Leon, Kane, we need to move fast! Astrid is shifting!' They nod. Leon and I shift into our wolves. Kane supervises Alice and Vanessa in his human form.

'We will be right behind you, Alpha!' Kane yells out.

We run until we can see the packhouse. There are hundreds of pack warriors ready and waiting for us. I shift into my human

form and put my pants on. I scan the area for Alpha Zenith, keeping my eyes on him, and slowly walk toward him. Alpha Zenith paces toward me, and we come face to face. He cracks his neck from side to side. He is shirtless and ready to shift.

'Hand Astrid and Seth over now. No one has to die,' I say. Alpha Zenith laughs.

'Astrid belongs to James and this pack now.' he says.

'Kane! Bring them out!' I yell. Kane steps forward in front of our pack warriors with Alice and Vanessa. Alpha Zenith grinds his teeth and lets out a growl.

'I thought I'd bring your Luna and daughter along for the show, I grin.

'Or we can trade. Astrid and Seth for Vanessa and Alice.' Alpha Zenith glares.

'Or I can kill you and claim your pack and have everything! want!' He snaps.

'War it is!' I say, growling.

'War it is then!' Alpha Zenith yells as he walks back to his warriors. He shifts into an ugly, large, grey wolf. His ear is missing, and he is worn and ragged. I shift into my black wolf

and let out a howl, signalling war. In wolf form, my warriors charge toward Alpha Zenith's warriors. I lose sight of him and charge toward the others, attacking us, crashing into them,

and biting any area of fur exposed to me.

Two wolves run toward me and pounce. I quickly rip the throat of one out while the other bites my leg. I whimper, release the wolf I have hold of and lunge at the wolf, gnashing my leg. Clawing his face, he releases me. I pounce and bite into his side, tearing a large piece of flesh from him. He retreats, yelping. I observe the two packs fighting. It isn't a pretty scene.

| shift back into human form to look for Astrid! I run toward the packhouse.

'Leon! Follow me!' I yell. Leon follows as we race into the packhouse. I can hear Astrid's screams beneath the floor.

'Leon, a door must lead down to the cells,' I figure.

'Astrid!' I yell, running through the house.

'Alpha! Here! I found the entrance. It smells so good, like lavender and musk, Leon says. I push past him to time-poor for his observations and run downstairs.

Seth is in the cell on the left. A girl sits on the ground in the cell on the right. Astrid is curled up on the ground, screaming in pain

'Astrid!' I rattle the door, but it's locked.

'Where's the key?' | ask.

"Ryker!" Astrid screams, trying to crawl toward the door. She collapses in pain and lets out a scream as a bone snaps.

'Astrid, I'm going to find the key, okay?' I run up the stairs. Leon is watching the girl in the other cell.

'Leon! What are you doing?' The girl is also gazing at Leon.

'Mate!' They both mumble in a trance.

'Leon, if you want to save your mate, I suggest we find the key!' I yell.

Leon nods, and we search in vain for the keys. Then, finally, I hear them dangling in someone's grip behind me.

'Looking for these?' A male voice behind me asks.

James dangles the keys in front of me enticingly. John is with him. I shift into my wolf, as quick as James and John do. I lunge at James and bite into his chest. John bites into my ribs, and two snap in his lock-hold. Leon lunges at John, pushing him off of me. James and I fight each other, neither backing down. We are both covered in gashes. Astrid screams in pain. I lunge at James, biting down as hard as possible, ripping a sizeable chunk of flesh from his neck. Knowing he will bleed out, I finish him quickly, instantly snapping his neck. John lets out an anguished howl. Leon uses this to his advantage and rips John's stomach open.

| grab the keys back in human form and unlock Astrid's cell. I

throw them over to Leon to free Seth and his mate. Our chemistry envelopes us in a sentimental degree as I hold Astrid in my arms. I gently wipe her hair from her face.

'Ryker! You're here! She cries.

'I promised you I'd be here for your first shift,' I whisper.

I hold her tightly through her screams, feeling the discs in her spine snap as I hold her in my arms.

'You can do this. It will all be over soon. I promise,' I assure Astrid. she cries again as another bone snaps. Her muzzle develops, and her fangs protrude from her top jaw. Glossy white fur clothes her body, tearing off her skirt and blouse. Her last scream becomes a majestic howl.

'Astrid! She tries to stand on all fours and struggles with her balance.

'Whoa!' Seth and Leon say, amazed. 'She's a pure white wolf! Seth adds.

Unsteady on her feet. I help her balance.

'Steady now, nice and slowly. I have you.'

She is beautiful: the most beautiful wolf I have ever seen. She is so large, similar to me in size.

'Pure white wolves are only from

'Moonstone Crest. Astrid is the last of her pack. Her mother, Alyssa, was a future Luna, and her father was Alpha Axton, she explains.

"How do you know?" | ask. She is holding Leon's hand tightly. Leon has his other arm around her waist and the biggest grin on his youthful face.

'Alpha Zenith is Alyssa's true mate,' she explains. We all freeze as Astrid growls and yaps.

'It's okay, Astrid, I say. I kneel so she can lick my face. She is like a gigantic marshmallow: she is so soft and squishy when I wrap my arms around her. She tries to play fight with me, nipping at my ankles and rolling onto her back in my lap.

I'm excited too. You're the most beautiful wolf I have ever seen.' I smile.

'Seth, see how our warriors are going. We need to defeat Alpha Zenith.

Astrid lets out an angry growl at his name.

'I know. Try to shift back into human form. I promise shifting back doesn't hurt at all. It will only take a moment when you shift again, and it will be less painful, I explain.

I'm going to fight. Amelia, stay here till the fight is over, Leon says.

'No!' Amelia shouts. I'm going to fight too!' She says, ripping

off her clothes and shifting into her wolf with Leon. They leave the cell. It's the first time Astrid and I have been alone since she left. My eyes well with tears as I adore the love of my life and her sweet, fluffy face.

Chapter 24

Astrid

Focusing, like Ryker, told me to. My body shifts back into human form. I open my eyes to see myself lying in Ryker's arms. I lock eyes with him, but this time, I see him through my wolf's eyes. 'Mate!' I say, and the world around me disappears. I feel a magnetic rush of endorphins and dopamine sweep through me-the attraction and lust I have for Ryker increase dramatically. I want to touch him, hold him, mark him and tell the world he is 'mine'. My arms wrap around his neck.

"Ryker, I missed you so much! I'm so sorry for leaving.'

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He wraps his warm, masculine arms around my waist and presses me to his chest. He cups my face in his hands.

'It's okay, babe. I know you didn't want to leave. I'm here now, and that's all that matters.' We stare into each other's eyes, and our mouths smash together. My body ignites with the intensity of our passionate kiss. It sends overwhelming, hot shivers down my spine. We eventually part from the kiss and pant.

Ryker lets out a little growl and nips at my neck.

'As much as I want to stay like this forever, we need to destroy Alpha Zenith. He brings me back to reality with his words. I stand up quickly, and my eyes change into my wolf's.

'Alpha Zenith is mine to kill!' I growl, instantly shifting.

Ryker shifts, and we're almost the same size. I'm only slightly smaller. We let out a loud, majestic howl in unison, warning Alpha Zenith that we are coming for him!

Bolting out of the cell, up the stairs and out of the packhouse, I see we have a lot of badly injured warriors. There are wounded wolves everywhere and many dead warriors and pack members from Shady Crest. Sprinting around for Alpha Zenith, I catch his scent. I follow it away from the battle through the long grass and creep through the trees. I can tell he is close. Ryker isn't far behind me, watching my back.

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Hearing a ferocious growl on my right, I turn to see Alpha Zenith in his wolf form lunging toward me. We roll a few metres, with Alpha Zenith pinning me down. My hind claws tear into his stomach. He emits a whimper and claws into my chest. I roll out from underneath him, then leap onto him, ferociously biting the back of his neck, and tear a piece of flesh off him. He howls in pain and then falls backward, almost crushing me beneath him.

Unable to move from under him, I rip into his ribs and listen to the sounds of bones breaking. He rolls off me, and we snap and snarl at each other, blood dripping from our muzzles. Alpha Zenith's neck is exposed briefly, so I lunge forward, biting as hard as possible. I Remember how he bit my mother's neck and shook her around like a rag doll. I show no mercy. Adrenaline rushes through me. Blood spurts everywhere, and I shake him around feverishly. I know he is dead, but I don't let go. Increased strength surges through me as my wolf grows larger. Having Killed Alpha Zenith, I now have the power of an alpha, and his pack members now belong to me. I'm not finished with him yet, and I release all my anger by ripping more flesh off him.

'Astrid! Enough! He's dead! Ryker says, slowly approaching me. I let out another growl, warning Ryker to back off. He freezes on the spot, shocked by my response.

'Astrid, you killed him. You can let him go now. It's over,' he says.

So much anger is boiling up inside of me. Alpha Zenith killed my mother! He murdered my whole family and pack in Moonstone Crest! His death hasn't satisfied me. It isn't enough compensation for what he has done. I growl ferociously, still tearing his flesh off in strips. Masculine arms instantly wrap around me.

'Astrid! You need to stop! You need to shift into your human form. This isn't you, Astrid. Don't be the monster he is. Please! I'm begging you!' He pleads. I cringe at his words. What am I doing? He killed my mother. I got my vengeance by killing him. But I continue to violently rip him apart like a monster. Finally, I let go of his body. Ryker can see the pain in my face. In my dazed reverie, I tumble into his lap. I'm severely injured and have lost too much blood from my wounds. I must have blacked out because I opened my eyes to stare into Ryker's

smooth jawline. He carries me bridal-style towards our pack members. Shady Crest pack members felt Alpha Zenith's death immediately and ceased fighting.

Approaching Shady Crest, the pack members see us, fall to their knees and bow their heads.

'Why are they bowing for us?' I ask Ryker.

'The moment you kill an Alpha, his pack becomes your pack, he explains.

'But I'm not officially part of a pack yet,' I say, confused. Ryker looks at me passionately.

'All you have to do is accept me as your mate, Astrid. And take your place by my side as my equal and Luna,' he smiles. I cup his face in my hands as he cradles me.

'I, Astrid Moonstone, accept you, Alpha Ryker of Shadow Crest, as my mate and your Luna. Ryker stares into my eyes. He is fending off tears of happiness with my words.

A strange warmth courses through my body. I feel an immediate sense of power and authority. 'Astrid, you have made me the happiest Alpha in the world, Ryker says, mind linking me for the very first time. I freeze at his voice in my head,

'I just heard you. In my head. Is that the mind-link?' I ask excitedly

'Yes, think of me in your mind. I will hear your voice in my head, he says.

'Okay. Ryker, if we didn't have hundreds of werewolves staring at us, I would kiss you passionately. Ryker lets out a chuckle.

I'm sure they wouldn't mind a show, he says mischievously.

"Ryker!" I say, slapping his chest playfully.

I'm only joking, babe,' he says, kissing my forehead.

Amelia and Leon run up to us, holding hands. Amelia is blushing and smiling. I smile back at her, happy she has found her destined mate, who has accepted her unconditionally.

'So, Amelia and Leon, hey?' I say, smiling. 'So, what happens now?' I ask Ryker.

'Now we tend to the injured. First, we will use the Shady Crest packhouse for all the wounded. After that, the warriors will bury the dead, and we'll return to Shadow Crest. Pack members from here are welcome to come with us. Or they can stay here and resume their lives, but this land is now our territory, he explains.

Doing my best, I help tend to the injured. Everyone calls me Luna. It's foreign to me, but I figure I'll get used to it,

"How are you feeling now?" Ryker asks, looking me up and down.

I'm completely healed from all the injuries I received. I can't believe how quick I heal now, I smile.

'You will always heal quickly now that you have your wolf, he smiles. 'I think it's time we all go home.' We hold hands, keeping our eyes only on each other. Everyone else is ready to leave to go home.

'Ryker? I was wondering if we could catch up with everyone later? My wolf is begging to be let out, and I thought we could go for a run together?'

I'd like that very much, he smiles and kisses me passionately.

'Ready to go, Alpha and Luna?' Seth asks. Our eyes remain locked on each other. Without turning around to look at Seth, Ryker waves his hand.

'You all go home. We will catch up later, Ryker says. Seth smiles and nods, leading everyone back to Shadow Crest. I pull my dress off and shift into my large white wolf. Ryker shifts, and I bolt toward him. We play-fight a little. I nip at his ankles and neck. He purposely falls over, feigning weakness and whimpers. I haven't had the strength to knock him to the ground. It is charming to watch: to play with his wolf is a gratifying experience.

We race through the woods to see who's faster. Our speeds aren't very different. The full moon is out in full view. We sit on a cliff edge near the packhouse and let out majestic, powerful howls together.

The pack members respond to us, howling together with joy and enthusiasm. Ryker's wolf sits beside me, resting his head on mine. He gives me a nip and a nuzzle every so often. We return to the packhouse when everyone is asleep and shift into our human forms. Before entering the front door, Ryker scoops me up and carries me upstairs to bed.

Chapter 25

Giggling and blushing as Ryker nips my ear playfully, I let out a slight growl. He puts me on the bed and crawls toward me, kissing me passionately.

'I love you, I say, staring into his eyes.

"I love you. I've wanted nothing more in my life,' he whispers.

'I want you to mark me, Ryker. It's time the world knows/ belong to you and you, alone.

"Are you sure you are ready?' He asks as his eyes glisten longingly into mine.

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Ryker pulls me on top of him, so I'm sitting fully on his lap. He caresses my back as we kiss with intense passion.

'Ryker,' I whisper.

'Astrid, he whispers. He grazes the spot on my neck, readying himself to mark me, and bites down with his protruded fangs. An overwhelming sense of love and euphoria rush through my body.

My fangs protrude, and I hover over the marking spot on Ryker's neck before biting down on his skin. Intense drowsiness overwhelms me. I bite into his nape, marking him before I slump into his chest and instantly fall asleep.

The sun shines on my face and hearing the sound of chirping birds outside the window wakes me. Feeling euphoric, only my neck aches where Ryker has marked me. I sit up slowly, rubbing my neck.

'Good afternoon, my beautiful Luna,' he says, smiling, sitting on the edge of the bed.

'Is it really afternoon? Did I sleep all day?' I ask, surprised. Ryker laughs.

'You've been asleep for two days, he says, smirking.

'What? How did I manage that?' I'm shocked.

'I expected you to be knocked out for a couple of days after marking you,' he smiles. I lift my legs out of bed to stand up,

and he races over to me.

'Where do you think you're going?' He asks and wraps his arms around my waist and kisses my neck.

We snuggle up on the bed. I rest my head and hand on Ryker's chest.

'It feels so right to be with you. It feels so good. Words can't express how much I love you. The thought of not being with you hurts me so much, I confess.

'I feel the same way, Astrid, and wish I could keep you in my arms forever,' he says, kissing the top of my head. Knowing I need to see how all my pack members are going, I have my shower and dress for the day.

When I look at my cheeks in the mirror afterwards, they have a

nice red tinge, and my green eyes seem more apparent and brighter somehow. I feel amazing for the first time. I feel safe and loved. Giggling, we waltz down the stairs like two giddy teenagers in high school. I sit on his lap in the dining room while we feed each other.

'I can't believe how cute you two are, Mia gushes, taking a seat facing us.

We blush and giggle. Ryker gives me a huge grin before quickly pecking me on the nose.

'It's so good to have our Luna home,' Seth smiles.

'It sure is, Ryker says, kissing and nuzzling my neck. I can't stop squirming and laughing. It tickles so much.

“Ryker, stop it. It tickles,” I plead, between laughs. He pulls me closer and kisses me on the cheek. Everyone in the dining room is extremely happy for us. We finish our meals with much joy and love floating around the table.

‘What happened to Alice and Vanessa?’ | ask. Everyone pauses and waits for Ryker to explain.

After what they did and tried to do, I couldn’t kill them. I couldn’t release Alice and Vanessa without monitoring them, though. Now that Alpha Zenith and her sons are dead, Alice is a shell of her former self. I think that’s punishment enough for her, Vanessa is more upset about losing her brothers, more than anything. I gave them the options of staying in the cell

indefinitely or returning to their old pack territory to help upkeep the land. Alice is no longer Luna, so she has no power or authority. They’re also not allowed to leave the territory without my permission, he explains.

‘Hayley and I are thinking of moving there, so we can monitor Shady crest for you and Alpha Ryker, Kane says.

‘That’s a good idea. Who knows what trouble Vanessa and Alice may cause in future? I’m glad. I won’t have to walk on eggshells around them. Now that I have my wolf, I can defend myself. They won’t be a threat to us anymore,’ I say.

Everyone nods in agreement and smiles.

‘What are the plans for the rest of the day, Alpha?’ Kane asks.

‘Our Luna and I have some work in the office we need to start, Ryker says. I smile.

‘Really?’ I say, excited.

‘You’re Luna now. We do everything together,’ he says with a beaming smile. I wrap my arms around his neck and nuzzle his mark.

‘How are you feeling?’ | ask, referring to his mark.

I feel happier than I have ever felt.’ He smiles. ‘How are you feeling?’

‘I mean your mark:’ I laugh.’ I’m a little tender from it, but I’ll be

fine in a few days,’ I assure him.

Finishing our breakfast, we go upstairs to his office. Ryker pulls up an extra chair next to me and sits. He places a stack of clean A4 paper and some pens on the desk in front of me.

O

‘We need to write to all the packs informing them Shady Crest is now our territory, and you’re now our Luna,’ he says. He writes the first letter before I copy everything he has written on a few more bits of paper. I write names and addresses on envelopes and enclose our letters inside them.

‘All done!’ I say, smiling.

‘It’s getting dark. Do we want to let our wolves out for a run?’ He asks.

'Yeah, let's go!' | grab his hand and lead him downstairs, running out the front door excitedly, removing all our clothes and shifting into our wolves. I lunge at Ryker, and we roll over dramatically. I nip at his face, and we bolt toward the woods playfully together. We play like a couple of puppies: nipping, yapping and nudging each other. We keep running until we find a lake, we come to a halt. I jump into the water full speed ahead. Then, in human form, I stand up in the water and flick my hair back in a wet wave high above my head.

Ryker's wolf is staring at me from the bank. The water reaches up to my shoulders. Ryker jumps full speed ahead into the water, splashing me.

'Ryker!' I yell, grinning excitedly. He lingers under the lake's surface before bobbing up again in human form.

We stare into each other's eyes and kiss.

He pulls me against his chest and holds me, stroking my back.

'You're amazing,' he says. I look up at him.

'No, babe. You're amazing,' I say, my eyes twinkling.

Chapter 26

Three months later,

Gently waking Ryker up, I cover his handsome face in kisses.

'I don't want to wake up, He murmurs. I throw a pillow at his face.

'Hey!' He sits up and throws a pillow back at me. I lean backward, dodging the pillow. I poke out my tongue: 'Ha! You missed!' | tease.

'Oh, did I?' He says, jumping out of bed and running toward me, flinging me over his shoulder and whirling us around in a circle.

'Ryker! Stop!' I giggle.

'You'll make me sick,' I say. Ryker stops.

'Well, you're no fun!' He feigns a pout.

'No fun? We are always having fun, I state.

'True' He says, lifting me over his shoulder.

Ryker runs into the dining room downstairs with a grin on his face. I scream his name the whole way down. 'Ryker!' I yell, trying not to laugh at his playfulness, Finally, he sits in a chair and pulls me onto his lap.

'There, I put you down,' he says, winking at me. I roll my eyes.

'Did you roll your eyes at me, Luna?' he laughs.

Everyone at the table eats in silence, smirking and trying to contain themselves at our antics.

'Since we have the day off, I'd like to take you into town and spoil you, he says, nuzzling his face into my neck. I nod in agreement and kiss his cheek. We finish breakfast and make our way to the shopping strip.

'Where would you like to go to first?' He asks. I look around at all the shops and can't help looking at the ice cream shop.

'Ice cream!' I yell, dragging him across the road.

'Ice cream? We just ate breakfast!' He replies.

'I know, but you said you wanted to spoil me today, and it's been so long since I've had ice cream, I say, pondering all the flavours I might choose.

'Ice cream it is!' He says. I squeal with excitement.

"Yay! Thank you!" I say, wrapping my arms around him.

Entering the ice creamery, a lovely shop assistant named Maisie greets us.

Alpha. Luna. How can I help you?' Maisie asks. I look at the wafer cones and the different ice cream flavours in the glass

cabinet.

I'll have the triple-scoop cone: one scoop of chocolate, one scoop of mint, one scoop of vanilla, and one scoop of the rainbow, please. Make it massive!' I tell Maisie. I surprised Ryker with my order.

'Astrid, that's a lot of ice cream for a werewolf,' he says, his hands in his pockets, as he waits patiently. Maisie scoops four different flavours of ice cream into a wafer cone just for me.

'I can't help it. I'm so hungry,' I say, my arms folded against myself, as I lean against the glass, watching Maisie add the last scoop of the rainbow to my wafer cone.

'Here you go, Luna. That's yours, Maisie smiles. I'm instantly in a cheerful mood, taking the ice cream from her. I bite into it without hesitation.

"Thank you so much, Maisie, I say, happily skipping out of the store. I sense Ryker rolling his eyes at me behind my back.

I saw that!' I laugh.

'Saw what?' He asks.

'You rolled your eyes at me, I say.

'How do you know?' He asks.

'I don't know. I just know that you did it,' I say and continue to eat my ice cream.

'Where should we go next?' He asks, licking grooves into a scoop of chocolate ice cream in his single-scoop cone.

'Medley's clothing store. I need some new jeans and stuff, I announce. All the ice cream in my cone has already gone, leaving the cone with its chocolate-filled point to be devoured.

'Okay,' he says, smiling. I wolf down my cone, savouring the rich chocolate end, and enter the store.

'Alpha, Luna: it has been a while since I've seen you both, Medley smiles.

'It has been a while, Medley. We have been very busy,' I say, smiling coyly at Ryker.

'Of course. I can imagine all the paperwork you have, now that Shady Crest is your territory,' she says, smiling.

'Yes, the paperwork has been insane, Ryker laughs.

'I'm after some new clothes. All my others don't seem to fit as comfortably as they used to,' I explain.

'You might be interested in our new range over here, Medley says, pointing to a wall of clothing that has just arrived.

Walking over to the new arrivals, I grab a pair of jeans and a shirt I like and hold them in front of my figure in a mirror.

'This dress is nice, Ryker says, passing me a dress to try on. I enter the changing room, lock the cubicle door, and push my legs into skinny blue jeans. I almost fall over trying to do the zip up.

'Are you okay in there?' Medley asks.

'I think there's something wrong with the size, Medley. They don't fit.' I walk out of the change room in a shirt and skinny blue jeans. The shirt is extremely tight around my bust and my tummy, and the zip and the button on the jeans won't fasten. Medley and Ryker giggle.

'Why are you laughing?' I ask. They cannot contain their laughs.

I love the shirt, babe, Ryker chuckles.

'But it doesn't fit,' I say.

'I'll see what else I can find you, He asks with a cheeky look. I roll my eyes and go back into the change rooms.

'I saw that!' Ryker says.

'Saw what?' I ask.

'You rolled your eyes at me, he says. I can't help but laugh.

'Okay, okay, I mumble, locking the cubicle door behind me. Ryker tosses some clothes over the cubicle door.

'Try these.' He says.

I put the dress on that Ryker chose: it's stretchy and strapless and sits mid-thigh, exposing a lot of leg.

'This fits much better, I say, showing him. He eyes me up and down with approval and pins me against the shop wall to kiss me. Our display of affection exceeds what's acceptable in a

shop setting.

'Should I leave?' Medley asks, her face a rosy, embarrassed, pink hue. We giggle and blush.

'I'll just be in the office out back if you need me,' Medley yells out, leaving us quickly and tottering off to her office.

We choose more clothes, and I try them on. I place the new clothes I want on the counter, ready to pay, and ding the bell on the desk. Medley totters back out and scans the items and puts them into a shopping bag. I'm happy to have clothes that will fit me.

'Let's go for a run!' I say as we leave the store.

'Sounds good,' Ryker smiles.

We reach the woods and leave the shopping bags and my new clothes by a large tree. We undress, and I stuff our clothes in the bag with the new items. Ryker shifts into his wolf and runs off. He pauses when he realises, I'm not following him. 'Astrid? You haven't shifted. Are you okay?' He links.

'I don't know. I can't shift. Nothing is happening. Why can't I shift?' I link back, with apparent panic in my voice. Ryker shifts back and dresses.

'It's okay. You're probably just too tired,' Ryker says, kissing my forehead. I shake my head.

'I don't feel tired,' I reply. Ryker takes my hand.

'Come on, let's go home,' he says, and I nod and follow for a while before stopping.

'Astrid?' He asks. I run to the closest bush and throw up.

'Let's go home. I'll call the doctor,' Ryker says, concern in his voice. My surroundings spin, and I feel faint before collapsing and blacking out

I hear the sounds of hospital machines beeping and whirring. I open my eyes and put my arm up to cover them from the bright lights.

'Am I in the hospital?' I ask.

'Astrid. You're awake!' Ryker says, taking my hand and smiling.

'You blacked out. I brought you straight to the hospital. The doctor will be here shortly to speak with us. They took some blood to run some tests. I'm sure you're fine, though. It's just a precaution. A nurse enters the room with a monitor on a trolley

'Alpha, Luna: the doctor is on his way. He asked me to get some things set up for him.' she smiles, plugging a machine into the powerpoint on the wall, switching it on and leaving the room.

'Alpha, it's been quite some time since you've been here,' the doctor smiles.

'Doctor Herman. Is she going to be, okay?' Ryker asks.

'Yes. Astrid will be fine. Her results came back positive. We'll do an ultrasound to see how far along she is.' Ryker and I look at each other, confused.

'Positive for what?' | ask. Doctor Herman chuckles.

'Pregnancy,' he says. My mouth drops open in shock.

'I'm pregnant?' | ask.

'Yes. Congratulations to you both, doctor Herman says, shaking Ryker's hand.

'I'm going to be a Dad?' He asks the doctor. The doctor nods and smiles, then squirts some gel across my lower abdomen and glides a sort of scanner device over the gel.

'And there it is,' he gestures to the screen.

Frozen in awe, staring at the medical screen, we see two little arms, two little legs, a body and a head. We can even hear a heartbeat.

'That's our baby?' I ask, looking up at Ryker. His eyes well with emotion as he kisses the back of my hand.

'Yes. That's our perfect baby, he whispers. Tears of joy and happiness overwhelm me.

'Ryker – we're having a baby!' I cry. Ryker squeezes my hand and kisses my forehead.

'You're going to be the best mother. I just know it,' he says, beaming.

'How far along is she, Doctor Herman? Ryker asks.

'She is twelve weeks, so there'll be no more shifting until the pup's birth, he explains. He grabs some paper towels and wipes all the gel off my stomach.

'That's why you couldn't shift today, Ryker ponders. Before can pull my shirt back down, and after Doctor Herman has finished wiping the gel off my stomach, Ryker kisses my belly.

'You have exhausted yourself, Astrid. I suggest bed rest for a few days. Avoid wearing yourself out. We don't want you collapsing again, Doctor Herman says. He prints the ultrasound pictures, and Ryker tucks them safely in his pocket before scooping me up in his arms.

'Time to take my family home to rest in bed, he says, leaning down to kiss my forehead before kissing me softly on the lips. We leave the hospital room beaming.

We arrive back home at the packhouse beaming with our baby news.

Ryker mind-links everyone in the packhouse to come downstairs for an urgent meeting. Mia and Amelia are the first to take a seat in the dining room. Then, Leon and Seth come running down the stairs frantically. You would think the packhouse was on fire.

'Luna, Alpha. Is everything okay?' Seth pants.

'Take a seat, Seth.' Ryker gestures to the empty chair.

'Now everyone needs to listen carefully. Things are going to be changing drastically around here.'

Mia and Amelia give each other a look of worry.

'What's the cause for the drastic changes around here?' Mia asks.

'Let's just say the drastic changes are for the better, not the worse.' I say.

Ryker takes my hand endearingly. Astrid and I would like to announce we are having a baby. Astrid is pregnant.'

Amelia and Mia jump up off their seats and begin screaming with joy as they race over to me and hug me tight.

'A baby? You're having a baby?' Amelia asks.

'Yes, I'm already three months pregnant.'

Amelia and Mia scream again while the guys block an ear with one hand and pat Ryker on the back with their other hand, congratulating him.

Chapter 27

I feel like and look like a beached whale struggling to get out of bed. 'Ryker!' I call out. A moment later, I hear Ryker running up the stairs.

'What's wrong? Is the baby coming?' He asks. I laugh.

'No, we're fine. I just can't sit up. My belly is so huge.' Ryker smiles and walks over to the bed to help me sit up before kneeling beside me and placing his hands on both sides of my belly.

'I can't wait to meet you, little one. It won't be much longer now, Ryker says, kissing my stomach. Ryker pulls me to my feet, helps me dress, and we walk downstairs for breakfast.

I think twice about sitting on Ryker's lap when I'm as big as | am. Instead, I pull out another chair, breaking our morning routine.

'Wait, he says, standing and sitting down in the chair I have just pulled out. Then, he gestures for me to sit in his.

'You're so sweet,' I say, smiling at him.

'Only the best seat in the house for you, my love,' he says, giving me a wink and a smile.

'Astrid, you must let Hayley and I take you into the city today for baby shopping, Mia says.

'Okay. Thanks. That would be fun. I need to buy so many baby items.'

Hayley sits in the driver's seat of her car, waiting for us, while Mia helps me hobble down the front steps to the car. I need Mia's help to buckle my seat belt.

'Almost got it, Mia says, forcing the belt buckle to clip in.

'If you get any bigger, Astrid, we'll have to buy a seat belt extension, Mia giggles. We all burst out laughing. The buckle clicks in.

'Got it! Mia yells with excitement.

We stop by Jim's diner on the way for milkshakes and burgers. Although I just had breakfast, I'm constantly hungry and eating for two.

'Do you think it's a boy or a girl? Have you thought of any names?' Jim asks.

I'm not sure what gender the baby is. I'm excited either way. Ryker and I have thought of a few names. Nothing set in concrete yet,' I say, slurping the last dregs of my blue heaven milkshake. I spin on my swivel seat and look out the window.

'Is something wrong, Astrid?' Hayley asks.

'No, I'm sure it's nothing, I say, spinning back around to bite into my burger. I can't help but feel I'm being watched. But, of course, Alpha Zenith is dead, so there's no cause for my anxiety

Shrugging it off, I focus on my food, Jim, baby-talk, the girls,
and the shopping we are about to do..

'Now that you've had your second meal today, we should head into town and start shopping,' Mia laughs.

'Okay. Let's fit lunch into that too,' I say. Mia, Hayley, and Jim burst out laughing.

'Go shopping, Astrid, and stop back here on your way back, and I'll make you another meal, Jim says.

'Woo-hoo!' I say, standing up.

'See you in a few hours, Jim, I say as I shuffle out the door.

We arrive in town and go straight to a baby boutique. There

are so many cute clothes to choose from, and not knowing the baby's gender, I restrict myself to shopping for only lemons, greens, whites and greys.

'Look at this teddy bear! Mia says, hugging it close to her chest. It is a fluffy brown bear with a green t-shirt. It's adorable and soft to touch.

'I think I'll buy this for the baby, Mia smiles. Hayley comes running over with a soft pink dragon.

I'm going to buy this for the baby!' She says.

'Oh, look at all these booties!' | squeal, picking up a set of every colour and tossing them into my trolley. There are a dozen different baby bouncers. They all rock and play nursery

songs. I chose the bouncer with green leaves printed on the pattern. Next, I add a box of nappies and a few packets of wipes to the trolley. The baby wraps are so adorable. I chose the set with giraffes on them. Then I came across a set with wolves printed on them. I find Mia and Hayley swooning over the baby toys.

There are baby rattles, soft cubes with the alphabet, and more. Not sure what to choose, I close my eyes, grab random items and place them in my trolley. Mia and Hayley laugh at my antics before we pay for the items and head out of the store.

'Next shop?' I say, and the girls nod.

'Let me take everything to the car, Luna, Mia says. I smile and push the trolley towards her.

T'll meet you in the next store,' Hayley says.

I'll see you soon, Mia says to Hayley.

Waddling up the road, I tell Mia I need to sit down and rest for a moment.

'There is a park over there. We can sit on the bench seat. I need the bathroom anyway, so I'll go while you rest, Hayley suggests.

We make our way across the road to the park with the gorgeous, colourful playground and many trees. A large tree provides lots of shade, so I sit underneath it, watching the children playing on the playground in the distance. I place my hand on my stomach.

I can't believe I will have a child soon. I can't wait to meet you, little one.

I hear rustling in the bushes behind me. Before I can turn my head to see what it is. Someone puts their hand over my mouth and drags me backwards. I tried to scream, but someone stuffed a rag in my mouth, and they pressed a knife against my throat. A blindfold wraps around my head, and then I'm shoved into a car. I spat the cloth out and speak.

'Who are you? What do you want?' I scream. I want to remove the blindfold, but someone quickly cuffs my wrists behind my back. The metal cuffs cut into my skin every time I try to free my hands. 'Please, don't do this!' I cry. They hold a cloth against my face.

Chloroform! A few seconds later, I blackout.

Dizzy and disoriented, I wake to a car door slamming. My belly weighs me down as I try to sit up. Someone opens my door when I hear footsteps. I'm dragged out of the car aggressively. I scream and try to grab onto something. Unfortunately, I'm surrounded by nothing but dirt and stones.

I mind-link Ryker

'Ryker! Please help me!'

'Astrid, where are you? What's going on?'

'Someone kidnapped me!'

'Where are you? Who has taken you? I'm going to rip their heads off!'

'I don't know. Someone snuck up behind me at the park. I never saw them. They knocked me out with chloroform. I couldn't link you until now. They have dragged me out of the car. I'm not sure where I am. Please, Ryker. I'm scared they will hurt the baby

'I will find you, Astrid. I'm sending the pack warriors out to search. Hopefully, we can pick your scent up and get a lead.

'Please hurry, Ryker. I'm scared. I can't shift to fight back.'

'I know, babe. Just try to stay calm. Link me when you know who it is or where you are.'

'Ryker, if anything happens to me, I just want you to know ! love you so much, and I have never been as happy as I have been with you.'

'Astrid, don't talk like that. Nothing is going to happen to you! love you

Hearing dirt and stones crunching under my feet, I'm pushed and shoved forward by my captor. I keep asking questions but don't get a reply. Finally, we stop walking, and I'm forced to sit against a pole. They released one of my hands, only to be

cuffed again around the metal bar. Someone drags a chair in front of me. They sit down, lean toward me, and remove my blindfold. My face pales when I see my captor.

'D-Dad?' I stutter.

'Did you miss me?' He asks with a twisted grin.

'Dad! Why are you doing this to me? You can see I'm carrying a baby. Please let me go,' I beg.

'I told you I'd make you pay for your mother's death, or have you forgotten?' He says.

'Dad. I didn't kill her. I know that now. It isn't my fault she died,

"Lies! If you kept still and listened to her, she would still be alive!' He snaps.

'No, Dad. You don't understand! Zenith killed her. Zenith killed mum!' I yell.

'No! A wolf killed your mother because of your incompetence! He yells.

'Zenith is the wolf! He was in love with mum, and she rejected him!' I yell. Dad lets out a chuckle.

'Has being pregnant mushed your brain? A wolf called Zenith was in love with your mother and killed her because she turned him down?' He says, clearly amused.

'Yes,' I reply. Dad shakes his head in disbelief.

'This will be hard to believe, Dad, but werewolves exist! Zenith was a man who could shift into a wolf! You never knew, but mum was a werewolf too!' I confess. Dad bursts into laughter.

'If that's the case, wouldn't that make you a werewolf?' He asks.

'Yes, it does. I'm a werewolf. That's what mum was going to tell me on my eighteenth birthday!' I tell him.

'Okay. If you're a Werewolf, prove it, Dad says.

'I can't shift

'So, you're confirming you're a liar?' He says.

'No! I can shift, not while I'm pregnant!' I yell.

'Sure, he says sarcastically.

'You know, you took something away from me that meant the world to me, and now here you are, carrying something that means the world to you,' he says, looking down at my belly.

'You will not hurt my baby?' I say, worried.

'On, Astrid, I will not hurt your baby. I'm going to kill it, he says.

'No, Dad! Please don't hurt my baby! Please, let me have the baby first, then you can kill me. Please!' I plead.

'You're pathetic and weak, and your baby will be too!'

Chapter 28

'Ryker! My Dad! He kidnapped me!'

'Are you at your father's house?'

'No, we aren't at his house. I'm in a big, old shed or run-down, abandoned factory. I've never been here before.'

'Leon is bringing me a map. We'll mark all the abandoned buildings and sheds and check each one.'

'You need to hurry. Dad said he would kill our baby.' Thear a ferocious growl through the link.

I'm going to kill him if he lays a finger on you or our baby!

Dad grabs my hair.

'Are you even listening to me? Or are you too busy zoning out?' He yells.

'Ryker is going to find me, and he is going to kill you for this!' I yell.

'Your precious Ryker, hey, so, he's your baby Daddy?' he says.

'Yes. Ryker is my mate!' I reply.

'Your mate? And what kind of term is that?' He asks.

'The Moon Goddess chose us to be together. We are soul mates,' I say. He smirks and stands, picking the chair up and

throwing it. I watch it smash into pieces.

'Please don't. I'm begging you,' I say as Dad approaches me.

He picks up the broken chair leg on the ground and strikes it across my head. He smiles and leaves. Liquid trickles down my forehead, drops off blood drip from my head onto my lap, but I can already feel the wound healing. Dad returns an hour later.

'How in the world? Where has the wound gone?' He asks. I ignore him. He kneels to inspect me, realising the deep wound on my forehead has healed.

'Impossible,' he mutters as he stands.

He grabs my face tightly.

'How did you do that?' He asks.

'I already told you. I'm a werewolf. We heal quickly.'

He glares at me for a moment. Liquid runs down my legs. My stomach seizes tightly, and I let out a scream.

'Looks like you're in labour,' he laughs. As soon as the contraction finishes, my forehead drips with sweat. I brace myself for the next contraction, letting out a scream, while my

Dad watches, smiling,

'I'm going to enjoy the look on your face when the baby comes. You won't get to even hold it!' He says as he walks

over to an old bench. I hear metal clinking against metal as he sorts through items.

'I think this will do the trick, he says, holding up a box-cutter knife.

'No, Dad! Please!' I yell and scream with the next contraction.

'Ryker! Hurry! The baby is coming. I'm in labour.'

'You're in labour?'

'Dad will kill our baby as soon as it's born!' I scream with the next contraction.

'There are twenty different abandoned places. We have checked most of them: We should be able to find you any time now. I promise I'll be there soon!

Dad approaches me, sits on the ground in front of me, and scratches the blade into the concrete to torment me. My contractions are closer together now. My body is almost ready to push.

We're here! I can smell your scent, he links.

I let out a scream with the contraction.

I can hear you. He mind-links me. I hear footsteps outside, twenty metres away. Dad hears them too. He opens a long case and pulls out a shotgun. He points the gun toward the door.

'Let her go!' Ryker growls. My Dad chuckles

'Or what?' He says.

'I'll rip your head off!' Ryker warns. My Dad aims his rifle and shoots. He misses.

'We're going to play it this way then, are we?' Ryker says, removing his shirt and jeans and shifting into his wolf. He charges toward Dad. The gun fires. Ryker yelps.

'Ryker!' I yell, watching the blood trickle from his shoulder. Dad reloads his gun.

'Well, I'll be damned. Werewolves exist. Just think of the money I would get if I shot you dead and skin your fur! He

shouts.

Ryker lets out a growl and circles him. Dad keeps the rifle pointed in Ryker's direction. I scream as another contraction comes and briefly averts Dad's attention, giving Ryker enough time to lunge at him. A shot rings out, and Ryker body-slams into Dad, pinning him to the ground. Ryker snarls close to Dad's face, baring his fangs and a mouth full of sharp canines.

'Whoa, steady there, boy...' Dad says, raising his hands in surrender. Ryker bites down so quickly, killing my Dad within seconds, Ryker shifts back into human form and runs to me. He removes the restraints from my wrists.

'The baby is coming, I pant. 'I'll need to push,

'You're safe now. I'm here now. Push babe. You can do this! He says reassuringly. I nod and push during the next contraction.

'I can see the head!' Ryker announces. 'Come on, babe! One more push!' With all my might, I push. The baby slides out into Ryker's hands and wails.

'You did it!' Ryker says, wrapping his shirt around the baby and placing him in my arms. He sits beside me while we look down in awe at our huge but perfect baby boy.

'Wow! He is one big baby, Ryker says.

'Definitely an Alpha like his Daddy, I giggle.

'No wonder your belly was so huge!' He says.

I've told the doctor and the others where we are. We'll have you and our son home soon, Ryker smiles.

'I can't believe this boy is our son. What are we going to name him?' I ask Ryker.

'What about Magnus? It's a tough, powerful name, and it also means large. Very fitting for a future Alpha. I think so anyway, Ryker says.

'Alpha Magnus. I like it!' | smile.

'It's settled. Magnus, it is, Ryker declares. The doctor arrives, and Ryker cuts the umbilical cord. The doctor drives us home

to find many pack members waiting outside the packhouse.

'Wow, half of Shadow Crest must be here,' I say, surprised.

Ryker steps out of the car before helping me up while | carefully carry baby Magnus. Ryker clears his throat and addresses our eager pack members.

'I know you're all are keen to meet the future Alpha of the pack, but Astrid and the baby need rest after their ordeal.

'It's a boy! Someone yells out.

'Yes, it's a boy!' Ryker confirms. Everyone cheers.

'A boy! The future Alpha of Shadow Crest!' Someone says. Ryker and I smile at each other.

'Unless you live in the packhouse, please go home. You'll have the chance to meet the baby during the week, Ryker says. Guests aren't happy about not being able to see the baby wrapped up in my arms.

I sit in an armchair in the living room. Ryker crouches down beside me and strokes Magnus' thick brown hair. Seth, Kane, Mia and Hayley watch on from other sofas as I unwrap him and take him out of his swaddle. Everyone gasps.

'He is twice the size of a newborn wolf-pup!' Seth says, shocked,

'No wonder you were eating ten meals a day, Astrid! It wasn't

to feed you. It was to feed him!' Mia says in astonishment. We all burst out laughing at the truth of her words.

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'We have named him, I say excitedly.

'What's his name?' Hayley asks, wide-eyed.

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'Well, we wanted a powerful name, he being a future Alpha. He is going to be huge as an adult. So, we've decided on Magnus,' I say, with a beaming smile.

'It's perfect!' Mia declares, clapping her hands together, delighted.

'Alpha Magnus. That is a powerful name, Seth smiles.

'He has your eyes, Astrid. And your hair, Hayley says.

'And his Dad's nose and handsome face,' I giggled.

'Our perfect baby boy, Ryker says, proudly placing his hand on my shoulder

Amelia and I sit on the porch drinking tea, heavily pregnant with our second babies, while Magnus plays with little Nina. Amelia and Leon's daughter aptly named Nina because she was such a small, tiny baby, and Nina means 'little girl'. I think it's pretty cute. We laugh as little Nina holds in a mouthful of water and squirts it into Magnus' face. Then she pokes her tongue out at Magnus and runs away. Magnus chases after her.

'Little Nina and Magnus are the complete opposite of each other. I say it would be interesting to see if the Moon Goddess chooses them as mates?' I giggle.

'I don't know. Every playdate we have, Nina wears poor Magnus out. She is always playing tricks on him. She is so silly and cheeky, and he is so serious and sensible, Amelia says, laughing.

'I think I need to go to the bathroom, I say.

'Me too, Amelia says. We both call out for our mates.

'Ryker!' I yell.

'Leon!' Amelia yells. They both appear.

'Is the baby coming? Are you okay?' Ryker asks, concerned. I place my hand on my fat belly.

'No, I'm fine. But I can't get out of this chair, and I need to go to the bathroom, I explain.

'Again? This is like the tenth time already, Ryker laughs.

'Well, next time, you carry the baby, and try not to pee every five minutes,' I joke.

'Okay, okay, he says, helping me up and kissing me.

"Leon! I can't get up, and I need the bathroom too, Amelia says, her hand on her swollen belly.

Ryker and I laugh. Water gushes down my legs. Ryker and I look down at the water puddling at my feet. We smile at each other.

'Are you ready for baby number two?' Ryker asks. I kiss him passionately on the lips.

'I'm ready for baby number three,' I giggle.

We make it to the hospital just in time.

Doctor Herman tells me to push again. On my third push, the baby slides out.

'It's a boy. Doctor Herman says.

'A brother for Magnus, I'm so happy, I say, gazing into Ryker's eyes.

'Astrid, he is perfect. I think you should name this baby. He

smiles,

'Flint, his name is Flint.' I smile.

A few weeks later, Amelia gives birth to a second daughter she names May. Magnus and Nina remain inseparable, even though they both have a younger sibling they could play with.

Kane and Hayley monitor Shady Crest and live there permanently. Alice and Vanessa fled the first moment they got. No one knows where they have gone to.

When Flint is nine months old, I find out I'm pregnant again. It overjoyed Ryker and me when I gave birth to a little girl, we name Josie.

Our family is complete, and we couldn't be happier. Nothing could ever come between my family and friends, not even a curse, could it?

'The Alpha Who Cursed his Mate'

Book Two of The Alpha Series

Chapter30

The next day I walk straight past Nina and ask May if she wants to climb some trees with me, Trixie, and Zach I can see out the corner of my eyes Nina's eyebrows crease in confusion as May and I have rarely ever spoken to each other, nor have we ever played together

Sure,' she smiles

Okay, let's go.' I smile and wave for her to follow.

Nina stands there watching us, then runs after us. 'Hey, I want to climb trees too, you know!

I stop and face her. 'No, only my friends can join,'

'What are you talking about, Magnus? I'm your best friend?'

You were never my friend,' I growl and regroup with others,

Nina's face turns sombre, with a hint of confusion.

'That's harsh, don't you think, Magnus? You and Nina have been the best of friends since you were both babies,' Flint says.

'No, they forced us to be friends, our mother's planning constant playdates every day and if she was my best friend, she wouldn't be getting me into trouble every single day. Nina no longer exists to me,' I snarl.

Flint and Josie flinch and give each other a sad look.

'You are welcome to join us as well, just not Nina,' Flint and Josie hesitate at first but decide to follow us as May grabs my hand with a smile and drags me towards the trees. 'Come on guys, let's see who can climb to the top first,' she giggles.

'Sorry,' Flint and Josie say to Nina, 'We want to go with them too.'

Nina looks down at her feet to hide the rogue tear sliding down her cheek.

We race towards the trees and I'm the first to arrive with May. Moments later, Flint, Josie, Trixie, and Zak arrive.

I could sense Nina watching us play from a distance, but I completely ignore her. Gripping onto branches one after another, I'm the first to reach the top of the tree. May climbs the same tree and sits next to me on the top branch.

Flint, Josie, Trixie, and Zak shuffle along the huge, thick tree branches and make themselves comfortable as we all admire the view of Shadow Crest.

'We're so lucky to live here,' Josie says.

I couldn't agree with her more. A forest of trees surrounds Shadow Crest with mountains in the distance. The buildings and houses are the Victorian styles with steeply pitched roofs, painted iron railings, and large porches. I look over at the Packhouse mansion. Excitement fills me for the day I become Alpha, but I can't help but feel something is missing. It's digging at my heart and soul, eating me away inside. I've never had this feeling before,

Are you okay, Magnus?' May asks. I look to May, who is only one year younger than Nina and, unlike Nina's Brown doe-like eyes, May's are blue. The rest of her features are like Nina's, except May's hair is much shorter.

"Yeah, I'm fine. Why do you ask?"

'Well, you seemed to be lost in thought and look sad.'

"Oh, sorry, I was just thinking about... things,"

'I know we have spoken little before today, but if you ever want to talk about anything, you can always... talk to me,' she says in a hopeful tone

'Thanks, May, I'm sure one day I will open up my thoughts to you,' smile.

May blushes and casually looks away

'Last one down is a rotten egg!' Zak yells.

We all quickly swing down and drop from one branch to the next.

'I won' I smirk.

You only won because Nina isn't here. We all know she is the fastest of all of us,' Josie pouts.

'If you mention her name to me again, Josie, then you can join Nina and become non-existent to me, too.'

be too.'

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Josie has a hurt look on her face and steps back while Flint glares at me.

'Let's go to Shadow Lake for a swim before we go back to the Packhouse,' Trixie suggests.

I nod in approval and head towards the lake. With May by my side. Trixie approaches and walks by my other side. Unbeknownst to me, they glare at each other behind my back.

We arrive at the Lake; I pull my shirt off, then my socks and shoes and dive right into the cool water. Zak and Flint join me in the deep end, while May and Josie roll up the legs of their pants and stay in the shallow area.

'I knew we were going to come here,' she smiles and removes her shirt and pants. She is wearing her bather's underneath and swims over to join us.

We duck under the water and hold our breaths for as long as we can. Zak and Trixie are the first to swim back up for air, followed by Flint. Feeling like I'm not enjoying myself as much as I usually would, I decided to swim away from them and hide behind a large boulder in the lake. I pull myself up for air and peek over the top of the boulder, watching Zak, Trixie, and Flint waiting for me to swim back up.

Their faces change to that of worry as they think I'm still down there.

Magnus?' Flint says.

They all look at each other and nod. Holding their breaths, they duck back down for a few moments while I stay behind the boulder. I look over at May and Josie, who are both oblivious to my joke.

Trixie swims back to the surface for air and looks around in circles, confused about where I could be. Then Zak and Flint swim to the surface and panic.

'Magnus! they yell, grabbing May and Josie's attention.

'We can't find him. You don't think he drowned, do you?' Trixie asks.

They all panic. May and Trixie cry.

Nina sprints out from the bushes and dives into the lake with great speed

'Magnus,' she screams each time she comes up for breath, frantic, with tears pooling in her eyes.

I can't contain my laughter any longer. I lift myself onto the boulder in hysterics.

'Magnus! That was not funny,' Flint yells.

'That was mean Magnus. We thought you had drowned,' Trixie cries.

'Not cool, Magnus,' Zak growls.

'Come on guys, don't be like that.'

I swim to the shore to where May and Josie are. As soon as I step onto the grass, I can't help but sense someone is behind me. I look to see tiny little Nina glaring up at me with her hands on her hips and tears streaming down her cheeks.

'Don't be like that! Are you serious Magnus? We thought you had drowned. I thought you had drowned, and all you can say is "Don't be like that?" I thought you were dead,' she says hitting my chest over and over.

I have that strange feeling come over me again, eating at my inner conscience, my inner soul. I look over at Zak, Flint, and Trixie, who are making their way out of the lake,

We better get back home, before mum sends the warriors out looking for us,' I say, treating Nina as if she was a ghost I couldn't see or hear

Everyone looks at her with sympathy. I don't know why. No one ever looked at me that way when she had played her stupid pranks on me.

We walk back to the Packhouse while Nina follows us slowly in the distance behind us.

As soon as we arrive at the Packhouse, I freshen myself up and join my parents for dinner with the rest of the Packhouse. Nina sits in her usual seat and tries to make eye contact. I pay her no attention and watch her shoulders drop out of the corner of my eyes.

'Bed early tonight kids, the weekend is over and you have school tomorrow,' my mother says

We all moan and grizzle except for Nina, who stays silent

'Is everything okay, sweetie?' Leon asks Nina.

She shrugs and stays silent as she pushes the food on her plate around with her fork

'What did you get up to today?' Amelia asks.

She looks up at me for a moment, but I keep myself busy eating my dinner.

'I climbed trees and swam at the lake with the others, mum,'

'Sounds like you had a fun time.'

'Yeah, fun...' she mumbles.