

Cry Wolf
by Peggy Christie

“Haven’t you ever read the story about the kid who cried, uh, about some animal or another?” Pam asked angrily.

Josh was doubled over in laughter and couldn’t answer her right away. For the third time tonight, he had fooled Pam into thinking they were being chased by wild dogs. It was particularly hilarious to him because not only were there no wild dogs, but they were in the middle of a corn field in Indiana for crying out loud. How could there possibly be any wild dogs around?

His three buddies were all snickering as Pam and her friend, Kelly, were scowling in anger and embarrassment. It was bad enough that she fell for the joke the first two times. Now, after the third time, Pam was sure that one of Josh’s friends, Peter, would think her a complete moron. Peter was the only reason she came along on this adventure in the first place and right now she could barely look at him.

Peter was Josh’s roommate. They all attended Valparaiso University in Indiana (or as the locals say, “Valparainsnow in Windiana”). Peter and Josh lived in Alumni Hall, along with Phil and Snake. Snake’s real name is Terrence, but because he always walks down the hall, shaking his keys, he makes a sound like a rattlesnake. Thus, the nickname was born. The four of them are inseparable, and have been since their freshmen year. And this little nighttime excursion was their brilliant idea.

Pam and Kelly were roommates in Guild Hall and had only met this year. But over the past two months, they had grown very close, almost like sisters. Kelly had a huge crush on Snake and when she found out what the boys were planning, she invited herself and Pam along. Pam was beginning to think the only reason they allowed her and Kelly to come was to humiliate them.

“C’mon, Pam. Please?” Kelly had whined at Pam. “This is my big chance to get Snake to notice me.”

“I don’t know, Kelly,” Pam answered. “We’re going out to some old cornfield, in the middle of the night, just to walk around? What is that all about?”

“There a little lake nearby, too. Maybe we’ll all go skinny-dipping,” Kelly giggled.

Pam rolled her eyes.

“Give me a break, Kelly. Do you actually want to go swimming, naked, in the dark, in, quite possibly, a filthy lake you’re not familiar with, just so some big muscle-bound no-brain will go out with you?”

Kelly’s blond wavy hair bounced as she emphatically bobbed her head up and down in affirmation.

“C’mon, Pam. Please, please, please, please, please?”

Pam covered her ears and shook her head back and forth. Realizing it would take a little more convincing, Kelly pulled out her trump card.

“Peter will be there.”

Pam stopped shaking her head and pulled her hands away from her ears. She looked up at Kelly and a half grin crooked the left side of her mouth. Peter Knight will be there. Peter was in

her Creative Writing class on Mondays and Thursdays. He was five feet eight inches tall, had wavy brown hair and bright green eyes. He was a little on the skinny side but he had a smile that would light up the darkest cave. Pam called it contagious because whenever he smiled, she found herself grinning as well, no matter how she was feeling.

“Pam? PAM!”

Pam shook herself from her reverie and looked up at Kelly. Her grin told Kelly everything she needed to know.

“I knew that would get you. The guys will be here in half an hour. We’ve got to get ready.”

Now, standing out in this damnable cornfield, Pam was furious she let Kelly talk her into going. In truth, it was her libido that did most of the talking, but that was besides the point, she reasoned. A zillion mosquitoes were trying to eat her alive, she had sweat of most, if not all, her deodorant running from the nonexistent dogs, and to top it all off, Peter was laughing at her. If she had driven, instead of Phil, she would have walked off and left them all here to fend for themselves. She felt her face burning with frustration when, suddenly, Peter walked over to her.

“Don’t pay any attention to Josh. He’s only truly happy at the expense of other people’s dignity. He doesn’t really mean any harm, okay?”

Pam was too angry to get excited over the fact that Peter was talking to her. “Maybe he does it because he’s an asshole. Did you ever think of that?”

As soon as the words left her lips, she was instantly sorry. “I’m sorry. I know he’s your friend and all. But he’s just so...he’s just so...”

“Annoying? Obnoxious? Really, really irritating?” Peter finished her sentence. He flashed her a big smile and she could do nothing but return the gesture.

“I know Josh can be a handful. Sometimes I wonder why I continue to room with him. But he’s a barrel of laughs when you need it the most.”

They both looked over at Josh. He was still laughing but at some point had fallen down and was now on his knees with his arms wrapped around his ribs. Tears were streaming down his face and his breath was hitching as he tried to control his laughter. Pam glanced at Peter while jerking her thumb at Josh.

“A barrel of monkeys is more like it.”

Peter threw his head back and howled with laughter at her joke. She beamed in surprise and pride at making him laugh. She laughed along with him until they collapsed in a heap on the ground. The others watched them, wondering what was going on. As they turned their attention from Josh to the giggling pair, Josh took note and quickly stopped laughing. Frowning, he stood up and slowly circled the group.

Now that he was no longer the center of attention, Josh needed another plan of attack. These stupid girls were ruining everything. He looked over at Kelly. She was smiling up at Snake, batting her eyelashes like the bubble-brain she is. And Snake was eating it up. He loved every minute of it. He draped his arm around Kelly’s small shoulders and she snuggled into his embrace. Josh snarled at them and looked at the others. Phil was standing over Peter and Pam, wiping his glasses on his shirt, grinning like an idiot. Pam was sprawled on her back, clasping her hands to her stomach, laughing wildly. And Peter. Peter was the worst of them all. He was sitting up, wiping his streaming eyes, and smiling down at Pam, like he was in love with her or something.

Ugh, I think I’m going to puke, Josh thought to himself. How could Peter like her? She was the dumbest and most gullible one here! She believed his wild dog story not just once but

three times. He smiled cruelly as he played it over in his mind. She had run like the hounds of hell were snapping at her heels until she was gasping and wheezing for breath. His smile spread wider as a plan formed in his mind. "If it ain't broke, don't fix it," he muttered under his breath. He snuck away from the group and gathered a few hand-sized rocks. As he sauntered back towards his friends, he whipped one behind him, into the lake, which was actually more like a small pond. The loud *ker-plunk* broke through all the laughing.

Josh turned around and looked at the water.

"Hey, guys? What was that?"

The group stopped laughing, one by one, and Phil walked over to Josh. Peter stood and held out his hand for Pam. She grasped it tightly and hauled herself up off of the ground. She stumbled slightly and fell into Peter. He gripped her arms to steady her as she blinked up at him. He was grinning down at her.

"You okay?"

She nodded, her throat too constricted with excitement of being this close to him to be able to utter any sound. He beamed at her and slipped an arm around her waist. She wrapped her own arm around him and they walked over to where Josh and the others were standing, looking out over the pond. Josh and Phil were arguing.

"You're so full of shit, Josh. This is just another one of your jokes. It's getting a little old, don't you think?"

"I'm serious," Josh pleaded with him. "I heard something out in the water. It sounded like something was splashing around in there."

As the others stood on the bank, Josh took one step back from them and threw another rock into the corn. As it crashed through the stalks, everyone's head snapped to look. Josh pounced.

"Ah-ha! Did you hear that? Was that part of my joke, Phil? Am I somehow sneaking around in the corn to scare you? Do you think I've got another buddy in there pretending to be..." He paused for effect and glared at Pam. "...a wild dog, maybe?"

Pam frowned at him but still looked nervous. Josh had to use all his control to keep from laughing. Peter was studying Josh closely. Usually he could tell when Josh was pulling a practical joke. But to be honest, this time he wasn't sure.

"Maybe we ought to head back to the car. It's getting late anyway and I'm getting eaten by all these damned mosquitoes."

Josh nodded his head and added a nervous tremor to his voice.

"Yeah, I think we'd better get back to campus."

As they all headed back down the trail towards the car, Josh hung back. After walking a few yards, he tossed another rock into the field. Kelly inhaled sharply and Josh clamped a hand over his mouth to stifle a giggle. He looked over at Peter and saw him pull Pam close and give her a comforting kiss on the top of her head. Josh quickly swallowed his mirth and almost gagged on it. He raised his arm to throw the last rock when something moved out in the corn. The full moon illuminated a group of stalks about 20 feet in on the left, rustling and shaking.

Josh stopped walking and stared out into the field. He looked down at the rock in his hand just to make sure he really didn't throw it. As he looked up, the corn rattled again, but this time it was only about 10 feet away. As understanding dawned on Josh, the rock slipped and fell from his limp hand. It thudded quietly at his feet. As he stood in numbed terror, Phil stopped and looked back at him.

"Josh?"

Josh slowly turned to look at Phil. His face was awash in the milky moonlight that highlighted his fear and Phil frowned. As he started to walk back to Josh, Kelly and Snake stopped as well and watched Josh with growing concern.

“Josh, man, are you all r-”

Phil was plucked from sight almost as if a vaudeville stagehand had jerked him off the path with a giant hook. With unbelievable intensity, his scream shattered the night. Peter and Pam whirled around and stood dumfounded. They hadn't seen Phil disappear into the corn. Kelly was screeching at the top of her lungs and Snake was shaking his head back and forth, as if by denying his senses, it never really happened. Just as Josh thought his eardrums would explode, Kelly and Snake were pulled into the corn as well. Their muffled screams sounded for a few seconds and then, with one guttural grunt, all was silent. All, that is, except for what sounded like twigs snapping and breaking, along with sucking and licking noises, coming from the field.

Peter and Pam shared one terrified look and then turned and sprinted for the car. They both called for Josh over their shoulders but he stood frozen in place. He watched helplessly as a creature, black as pitch, leapt into the air. It landed directly on top of Peter and Pam, crushing them under its monstrous body. Sitting on Peter's back, it munched away on Pam's neck and head. Her right foot kicked up dust as her nervous system went into overload, sending impulses from what remained of her brain down to her limbs. When she finally died, what was left of her could fit in a small garbage bag.

The creature licked its clawed fingers and stood up. It turned its black eyes on Josh, seeing him for the first time. It grabbed one of Peter's legs and dragged him as it walked towards Josh. He could see Peter, half conscious, making feeble grabs at the ground to stop from being dragged to his death. The creature took no notice of this as it stepped up to Josh. Releasing Peter's leg, but placing its foot on the small of Peter's back to keep him from crawling away, it studied Josh.

It was in the shape of a man but it was no man. It was a least seven feet tall with broad shoulders and arms so long that the thing's knuckles scraped the ground. Its hands were the size of baseball mitts and each of its ten digits ended in a wicked three-inch talon. It was as black as the night surrounding it, but a slimy coating reflected the moonlight so it glistened with moisture. Its head was twice the size of a normal human, with razor-sharp teeth and deep-set black eyes. It had no nose but two nostrils carved in the middle of its face. Hot, fetid breath washed over Josh as this creature from the abyss stood over him. Josh could do nothing but tremble and wish for a quick death. But the creature had other plans.

Seemingly convinced that Josh wasn't going anywhere, the creature turned and picked up Peter by the shoulders. His hands flailed weakly at the vise-grip the creature had on him. It turned, so Peter's body was directly in front of Josh, and bit into Peter's neck. Josh barely blinked as his friend's and roommate's blood washed over his face and chest. The creature dropped Peter's body and ground its foot into his chest. Once this was done, it turned to Josh and grabbed his jacket. It wiped its hands clean, leaving Josh smeared with blood. It turned to the field and made a few high-pitched chirping sounds, not unlike a golden finch or a cardinal. A few answering chirps sounded back and two more creatures emerged from the cornfield.

They seemed to be receiving directions from what Josh could only assume was the leader of their pack. The two new creatures walked away, one into the field and one towards Pam's remains. When they returned, each was holding torn pieces of clothing from Pam, Phil, Snake, and Kelly. They turned on Josh and rubbed the blood-soaked garments all over his body, concentrating on his hands and face. They dropped the clothes at his feet and returned to the

field. The leader stooped down and studied Josh closely. It reached out and tousled Josh's hair, scratched up his hands and face a bit, and untucked one side of his shirt. It slowly walked around him, studying every angle. When it once again faced Josh, it nodded in satisfaction. A malevolent grin split the creature's face, revealing hundreds of sharp pointy teeth, glinting like diamonds in the moonlight. Giving him a fatherly pat on the shoulder, it turned and walked back to the field, and disappeared in a soft rustle of cornstalks.

Josh slowly turned his face to the sky. As he stood there, gaping at the moon, a single tear rolled down his cheek. He stayed that way, even after the farmer who owned that cornfield stumbled across him the next morning. Even when the police picked him up, he still looked up at the sky, mouth gaping open. Only when he overheard the middle-aged officer talking into his CB radio, relaying to the dispatcher that they had found the slasher that'd been enjoying a killing spree around here the past couple of months, did Josh finally move. He turned his head, looked out into the cornfield, and began to laugh.

THE END

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