

Grace of a Wolf Chapter 10 - Grace: Great Escape

Chapter 10: Grace: Great Escape

The beam of my flashlight flickers, casting eerie shadows across the forest floor. My heart skips a beat. Not now. Please, not now. I tap the plastic casing, and the light steadies.

Thank God.

A gust of wind whips through the trees, sending a shiver down my spine. The temperature's dropping fast. I fumble with my backpack, fishing out the extra sweater I'd snagged from the omega lodge. It smells of mothballs and desperation, but it's warm. I pull it over my head, grateful for the added layer.

My stomach rumbles painfully with hunger. I've sipped at water and snacked on jerky through the day, but my supplies are finite. I can't eat them too quickly.

2

I tear off a small piece of jerky with my teeth, chewing slowly. Like it's gum.

One foot in front of the other. That's all I can focus on now. My legs ache, muscles screaming for rest. My blisters tore open miles ago. But I can't stop. Not yet. I need to reach humans.

The river's behind me, its rushing waters a distant memory. I pray it's enough to throw them off my scent. Not forever—I'm not stupid enough to hope for that. I just need time.

Margo's probably realized I'm gone by now. The thought sends a fresh wave of panic through me. Will they come looking? Part of me hopes they will. That someone, anyone, cares enough to wonder where I've gone.

4

But that's the old Grace talking. The one who still believed she belonged. I know better now.

"Let them forget about me," I mutter, though the words are bitter on my tongue. "It's what they've always wanted, anyway."

Okay, yeah. I'm feeling a little sorry for myself, but it isn't all hopeless.

The irony isn't lost on me. A week ago, the idea of being forgotten would have shattered me. Now? It might be my only chance at freedom.

Each step takes me further from the home I've had for years. It would be a lie to say I have confidence in surviving with humans. I'm not even sure how things work in the human world anymore.

The forest grows denser, the trees closing in around me. My tiny flashlight barely penetrates the gloom. Shadows dance at the edge of my vision, playing tricks on my exhausted mind.

2

A branch scrapes across my cheek, drawing blood. I wince, touching the spot gingerly. It stings, a sharp reminder of how ill-equipped I am for this journey. What was I thinking? I'm no survivalist. Just a human girl, alone in a world of wolves.

Had I known this day would come, I would have slacked off a lot less in training. Though, no one ever expected me out on some sort of survival-level mission, so maybe it wouldn't have helped that much.

My foot catches on a root, sending me sprawling. The flashlight flies from my hand, clattering against a rock. The light flickers once, twice, then dies. Darkness engulfs me.

"No, no, no," I whisper, scrambling on hands and knees. My fingers brush against the cold plastic, and I shake it frantically. The light flickers back on, sending a rush of shaky relief through my limbs.

Unlike wolves, I can't see in the dark.

I *need* this light.

Something clatters to my left and I freeze.

My eyes dart around, searching for movement in the inky darkness beyond my flashlight's beam.

2

Nothing.

Probably just a rabbit. Or another squirrel. I force myself to exhale slowly, willing my racing heart to calm. But the seed of doubt has been planted, and it takes root quickly in the fertile soil of my fear.

8

I start walking again, my pace a touch quicker than before.

A rustle in the underbrush to my right. I whip my head around, the beam of light dancing wildly across the forest floor.

Again, nothing. But the prickling sensation at the base of my neck intensifies.

You're being paranoid, Grace. No one's following you. They don't care enough to bother.

2

The thought should be comforting, but it only twists the knife of loneliness deeper.

An owl hoots in the distance, the sound carrying clearly through the still night air. I jump, a small yelp escaping my lips before I can stop it. The noise seems to echo, bouncing off the trees and coming back to mock me.

Pathetic.

I grit my teeth, anger flaring hot in my chest. "Get it together," I mutter to myself. "You're not some helpless damsel. You can do this."

A distant howl cuts through the night, freezing the blood in my veins. I stop dead in my tracks, ears straining to pinpoint the direction. It came from behind me, far off but clear.

No. No, it can't be. They're not looking for me. They don't care enough to bother.

But what if they are?

The thought sends a fresh surge of adrenaline coursing through my body. I pick up my pace, no longer caring about stealth. My footsteps seem thunderously loud in the quiet forest, but I can't bring myself to slow down. The need to put distance between myself and that howl overrides everything else.

Branches whip at my face as I push through the undergrowth, leaving stinging scratches in their wake. My lungs burn with each ragged breath.

A heavy weight slams into my back, knocking the air from my lungs. I hit the forest floor hard, leaves and twigs digging into my palms as I scream.

Heart pounding, I scramble to my feet, spinning around wildly.

A massive black wolf stands mere feet away. A familiar ethereal glow surrounds him, casting the nearby trees in an otherworldly light.

3

My savior.

2

He pants heavily, sides heaving with each breath. His head tilts to one side, regarding me with a human-like curiosity. There's no aggression in his stance, just... interest.

"You," I whisper, my voice barely audible over the thundering of my own pulse.

The wolf's ears prick forward at the sound. He takes a step closer, and I instinctively back away. My heel catches on a root, nearly sending me sprawling again.

He pauses, head cocking to the other side now. A low whine escapes him, sounding apologetic.

4

I swallow hard, trying to steady my breathing. "Why are you back? I told you to go."

But, of course, he doesn't answer.