

Grace of a Wolf Chapter 11 - Grace: Rules

Chapter 11: Grace: Rules

Time isn't my friend, so I lay down the ground rules. "Look. I'm trying to get out of here, okay? You can come with me if you want, but no more skulking around in the shadows. And definitely no pouncing on me anymore. If I sprain my ankle, I'm never getting out of here. Got it?"

Not even a flick of his ears to show acknowledgement.

He has to be a shifter, though. There's no way some random, glowing wolf just exists on its own in the wild.

"You're a rogue, right?"

Ear flick.

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I guess that's his way of saying yes. "Okay. I don't know why you won't shift, but that's not my business. Either help me or stay out of my way. That's all I'm asking."

No ear flick, or tail wag, or any change in his body language whatsoever.

Fine. Don't answer. Two can play the quiet game.

Turning my attention to my mission, I glance around. Which way was I headed?

East, because I need to head east toward the city. But which way is east? Now that I'm all turned around, I'm not sure. The stars peek through branches above, but their patterns mean nothing to me. That *definitely* is something we covered in training, and would be helpful to know about now.

My feet crunch over dead leaves as I pick a direction that seems right and start walking. The wolf's massive paw steps behind me pause. A low rumble draws my attention back to him as he winds around me.

He plants himself in my path, blocking the way forward.

"What now?"

His head tilts to the right, ears perked forward.

"That way?"

Another ear flick. Progress.

I change course, following his suggestion. The tension in my shoulders eases as he falls into step beside me. His ethereal glow provides better light than my dying flashlight ever did.

My hand reaches out, brushing over his side. The fur feels softer than I expected, almost silk-like between my fingers. He doesn't pull away.

His presence keeps the worst of my fears at bay, lulling me into comfort.

"I'm heading to Sterling City," I say, breaking the silence after a while. "It's the closest human settlement I know of. Should be about east of pack territory."

Not sure how far east, but I do know it isn't far—by car. Walking is a different story.

His steady pace never falters.

"I can't stay with the pack anymore. Humans don't belong in wolf packs. I was stupid to think otherwise."

A branch snaps under my boot, but I'm no longer paranoid about making a little noise.

"The thing is, I don't know the first thing about being human. I lived a normal human life until Alpha took me in, but that was a long time ago. A *really* long time ago. Haven't been back since."

The wolf's ears swivel toward me, listening.

"I don't even know how to get a job, or rent an apartment, or—"

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My foot catches on an exposed root. The ground rushes up to meet my face, but sharp teeth snag the back of my sweater. The wolf's quick reaction saves me from eating dirt.

He lets go once I'm back on my feet.

"Thanks."

Ear swivel again.

See? He's listening. We're having a conversation.

It's shocking how lonely I feel. It hasn't been that long since I was happy. Only days, really. And yet it feels like months since the last time I could talk to someone comfortably.

I'm not usually this much of a talker. It isn't like I won't, but I spent most of my time around Rafe listening.

Well, whatever. The wolf doesn't seem to mind, and—

"Fenris, why the hell did you bring her here?"

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—shit.

My heart plummets to Earth's core, taking my blood pressure with it. My knees? Traitorous things, they buckle, causing me to stumble three paces, ending in a drunken sway.

Someone grabs my arm with a hand that's hard and cold as iron, hauling me upright as my feet scramble.

It takes a few seconds, but my brain and body sync back up. My heart starts beating again, even if it is a little too fast and furious, and I curse myself nine ways from Sunday for being so stupid as to trust some random fucking shifter in pack territory.

Of *course* he brought me back.

Of. Fucking. Course.

Idiot!

As I'm busy berating myself, iron-hand-guy spins me around.

My breath catches in my throat as I stare up at the man towering over me. His scowl is enough to shrivel my soul and every last millimeter of my self-worth, and I *know* his frosty gray eyes are coming for my dreams.

The nightmare kind.

He's handsome, too. Because of course he is. All dark and broody and serial killer-esque.

13

Black tattoos snake up his neck and disappear beneath the collar of his shirt, intricate designs that shouldn't exist on a shifter's skin. The patterns seem to shift in the moonlight, as if alive with their own dark energy.

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He smells like a walking ad for some expensive cologne. The kind with half-naked guys on TV. Warm, dark, sexy. Nothing like Rafe, who smells like the forest.

3

This is something else entirely, something I can't name, though it makes my head spin. Or maybe it's my bottomed-out blood pressure.

"I asked you a question." His voice rolls through me like thunder, deep and commanding. Each word drips with barely contained violence. Also, I'm pretty sure he didn't ask me anything.

But maybe he did, when I was busy ogling him.

My mouth opens, but no sound comes out. The grip on my arm tightens, and pain shoots through my muscles. It feels like he's going to pop it right off, no chainsaw necessary.

He steps closer, and I catch more details I wish I hadn't. A scar cuts through his left eyebrow. He has a scar under his bottom lip, like he used to have a piercing there. Those gray eyes hold secrets darker than the spaces between stars.

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Okay, the last part is really just the lower half of my body coming online to whatever strange pheromones he's putting out.

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Everything about him screams danger. Power. Authority. And sex. Lots of sex.

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My brain is suddenly inundated with way too many theories on how the man's chest looks under his shirt, in ways it never did with Rafe.

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And then, through the sudden sexual haze that clouds my intellect, it clicks.

The massive black wolf. The ethereal glow. The way he moved through the forest like he owned it.

The Lycan King.

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Oh, God. Or Moon Goddess. Or who-the-fuck-ever deity is up there.

2

I've been wandering through the woods with the most dangerous shifter alive, treating him like some kind of pet. Telling him my pathetic life story.

1

My knees threaten to give out again, but his grip keeps me upright. The forest spins around me as the full weight of my situation crashes down.

I'm alone in the dark with the wolf king who supposedly murdered his last mate—

A soft whine cuts through my panicked mental gibberish, and I blink rapidly at the glowing black wolf standing next to the strange man, poking his wet nose against my arm, where it's gripped so tightly I'm positive blood flow has stopped.

Okay. Backtrack. Wolf is still there. So, not the Lycan King? Maybe a rogue. Rogue king? Do those exist? Or maybe a serial kille—

Pain shoots through my arm as he shakes me hard, growling some question at me. A shriek tears from my throat, echoing through the trees. The sound startles even me—high, piercing, full of raw terror. Like I'm being actively murdered.

Panicked self-preservation has arrived. A little late, but better than never, I guess.

1

The massive wolf's growl vibrates through my bones. Before I can blink, he rams his shoulder into the man's side. The impact knocks his iron grip loose, and I stumble backward.

My feet move before my brain catches up.

I turn and run.

"What the fuck, Fenris?"

His enraged voice carries through the trees, spurring me faster. My lungs burn. Roots and fallen branches grab at my feet, but terror keeps me upright and pure luck keeps me from spraining my ankle.

The darkness swallows me whole. Without the wolf's ethereal glow, I can barely see where I'm going. My hands stretch out in front of me, batting away branches before they can take out my eyes.

Thorns tear at my clothes. Every obstacle threatens to send me sprawling, and at least one sends a shooting pain through my ankle, leaving me with a limp.

But I keep going. I can't slow down.

The Lycan King (maybe). I just ran from the Lycan King (maybe). Or he's a serial killer. Or something.

12

Oh God, oh God, oh God.

A heavy weight explodes against my back, and my consciousness decides then and there to give up.