

Grace of a Wolf Chapter 7 - Grace: Put to Work

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My new life routine is simple.

Wake up every morning before the sun rises. Cook and feed everyone in the omega lodge—both male and female. Clean when everyone leaves for the day. Do the piles of laundry. Lunch, thankfully, isn't my problem—but it also means I don't get to eat. And then, of course, dinner, and more cleaning.

There are other staff who work at the omega lodge, but unlike me, they're proper omega wolves. Anything they don't feel like doing lands on my shoulders, and if I don't get them done, it's somehow my fault.

The first week of my new lifestyle ended with me being whipped five nights straight.

6

It isn't a normal punishment for shirking your duties. They just wanted an excuse to do it.

It wasn't a secret that many of the pack hated having a human brought in, when Alpha first adopted me. Like me, they lived in ignorance of my mother's identity. I'm sure they would have recognized her if they saw a picture, but I don't have anything like that. Only my memories.

It wasn't until the night of the Mate Hunt, when Alpha kicked me out of his home and family, that the pack learned the truth.

Mom was once mated to Alpha. Not as a proper Luna, of course. Mom, like me, was human. But she still bore his mating mark and was treated as his mate within the pack—until one day she disappeared, never to be seen again. From the gossip running rampant these days, I quickly learned that everyone thought she was dead.

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My father—my *real* father—is also my biological father. They were killed in a house invasion gone wrong on my twelfth birthday. Three days later, I was taken in by a supposed family friend: Alpha.

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His apparent care and warm home were more appealing than any foster home, even if I had to live among wolves.

If I'd known, I would have begged the foster system to keep me, but I doubt it would have made a difference. I had a home to go to, and someone willing to foot the bill. Why would they keep me in that situation?

I sigh, my hands sinking into the mountain of clean laundry before me. The scent of detergent tickles my nose as I sort through the pile, grimacing at the sheer number of boxers. Men's underwear. Great.

"At least they're clean," I mutter, folding each pair with quick, efficient movements.

My fingers brush against the soft cotton, and I can't help but think of Rafe. Did I ever fold his laundry? Of course not. That was a task reserved for the pack's domestic staff, not Alpha's daughter.

But I dreamed of being his wife. His mate. Dreamed of doing the laundry, of greeting him at the door with a home-cooked meal.

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Now here I am, reduced to handling strangers' intimates.

I shake my head, banishing thoughts of my ex.

Focus on the task at hand, Grace. One pair at a time.

The basket marked 'Jason' slowly fills with neatly folded clothes. T-shirts, jeans, socks, and yes, those dreaded boxers. I smooth out a wrinkle in a shirt, wondering idly about the man who wears it. Is he kind? Cruel? Does he even know my name?

Probably not. To most of the pack, I'm just the human. The outsider. The one who doesn't belong.

I place the last item in Jason's basket and set it aside, ready for delivery. A small victory in a day full of endless chores.

"Human girl! Get up here!"

The shrill voice of the head omega cuts through the air, echoing from the kitchen.

My feet drag as I make my way to the kitchen, dreading whatever new task awaits me. The linoleum floor creaks under my weight, announcing my arrival before I even reach the doorway.

The head omega is a stern-faced woman named Margo. She dresses like a secretary, with a black suit and hair pulled back into a classic bun, and always with a phone in

hand. She's also burly enough that, if I was asked with a gun to my head, I would have assumed her to be a bear shifter.

1

While I was still Alpha's daughter, she treated me with respect.

Now, I'm dirt beneath her shoe.

"There you are," she says, her tone clipped. "You're needed at the main lodge. They're short-handed."

"Yes, ma'am." I've learned to treat her with respect; she's the one who orders my punishments at the end of the night. I've watched as she ordered ten lashes, five nights in a row. Her expression never changed.

1

This woman wouldn't care if I died of exhaustion, as long as my work was done.

She looks me over, her lips pinched in disapproval. "Is that all you have to wear?"

Glancing at my oversized hoodie and sweatpants—one of my three outfits these days—I can only say, "Yes."

She sighs, clearly frustrated. "You'll need to find something else to wear. Wearing that reflects poorly on Alpha."

I blink at her words, the only outward evidence of my surprise. Since when do any of these wolves care? They've been mocking me since my downfall, saying human trash doesn't even deserve the clothes on my back.

Margo grimaces, shooing me away. "I'll find you something. For now, help them at the main lodge."

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Arriving at the main lodge is a bit of a nerve-wracking affair.

Being holed up at the omega lodge buried beneath a mountain of chores had one bright side: I never had to worry about running into Rafe.

Being in the main part of town, where all the wolves gather, increases that risk exponentially. I have no desire to run into him, either alone or with Ellie. My heart's still wounded and bleeding; it doesn't need to be torn apart any further.

The air outside the omega lodge crackles with an unfamiliar energy. Our small werewolf city, usually a picture of serene efficiency, now buzzes with frantic activity. Wolves dart to and fro, their movements urgent and purposeful. The central garden, once a lush oasis of tranquility, lies in ruins. Dirt flies as workers tear up flowerbeds and uproot shrubs with ruthless efficiency.

What in the world...?

The giant main lodge looms ahead, and I quicken my pace.

"Grace!"

1

I freeze, my heart leaping into my throat. That voice. No. Please, no.

But luck, as always, isn't on my side. From the corner of my eye, I catch a flash of golden hair. Rafe. And beside him, dark hair gleaming in the sunlight, Ellie. Two picture-perfect mates, arm-in-arm.

I don't wait to see more, rushing for the front doors of the main lodge. I burst through the entrance, chest heaving in relief, only to collide with a wall of muscle. Stumbling back, I look up into Beta's scowling face.

"Watch where you're going, human," he growls, lip curling in disgust.

He used to pat my head and tell me everything would be okay. Used to—

Ugh. No point in dwelling in memories of false care.

"I'm sorry. Margo sent me—"

"I don't care what that omega wants," Beta cuts me off. His eyes narrow, sweeping over my disheveled appearance. "But since you're here now, make yourself useful."

Before I can protest, he turns and barks at a nearby wolf. "You there! I've got someone to help you move those bushes."

"What?" I gasp, but Beta's already shoving me toward the door. "Wait, I—"

"Get to work," he snarls, and suddenly I'm outside again, blinking in the harsh sunlight.

A burly wolf grabs my arm, dragging me toward the ravaged garden. "Come on, we don't have all day."

I stumble after him. From a random errand to doing manual labor I'm in no way equipped to handle. Awesome.

Just another day in the life, I guess.

It's clear no one cares what I'm supposed to be doing. To them, I'm just another pair of hands. Expendable. Replaceable.

The wolf releases me with a grunt, gesturing at a row of uprooted bushes. "Start hauling these to the compost pile. And be quick about it."

I stare at the bushes, my stomach sinking. They're enormous, their root balls easily the size of my torso. There's no way I can lift these on my own.

"Is there some sort of equipment for this, or—"

He snorts. "Equipment? Just lift it up and take it over."

Yeah, that's about what I expected.

They know I'm human; they have to realize this task is just about impossible. But he storms off to do something else in the raucous atmosphere of the garden renovation.

Gritting my teeth, I bend down and wrap my arms around the nearest bush. Branches and leaves stab at my face as I struggle to lift it.

It doesn't budge.

Panic rises in my throat. If I can't do this, they'll punish me. Or worse, throw me out entirely. And then where would I go? I'm an adult now. There's no program in the human world to save me from homelessness and a lack of money.

6

I'm educated—if you count a werewolf high school diploma as educated.

But that's about it.

I try again, straining with all my might. My muscles scream in protest, but slowly, inch by agonizing inch, the bush lifts off the ground.

"That's it," a gruff voice says behind me. I guess he's back. "Now move it to the pile."

Sweat drips into my eyes as I stagger forward, the bush's weight threatening to crush me at any moment. Each step is a battle, my arms trembling with the effort of keeping the massive plant aloft.

After what feels like an eternity, I reach the compost pile. With a gasp of relief, I let the bush tumble from my grasp.

"Good," the man grunts. "Now do it again."

I turn back to the garden, my heart sinking at the sight of the dozens of bushes still waiting to be moved. This is going to be a long, painful day.

As I trudge back to grab another bush, movement near the lodge catches my eye. Rafe and Ellie stand on the steps, watching the activity in the garden. Watching *me*.

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Ellie's lips curl into a smirk as she leans in close to Rafe, whispering something in his ear. Whatever she says makes him laugh, his eyes never leaving my struggling form.

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