

Grace of a Wolf Chapter 8 - Grace: Exhausted

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As it turns out, there's some sort of massive event happening. The Lycan King is coming.

9

No one knows why, but there are a lot of whispers. He's been without a new mate for a long time, and has no heir. He's probably on the search for a mate, or so the rumors declare. Then again, the same rumors claim he killed the last one, so I'm not sure how reliable the gossip mill is.

11

Wolves aren't exactly like humans; their positions aren't handed down solely because of bloodline. A wolf must be an alpha to lead, but not all alpha fathers sire alpha children. Also, females can be an alpha wolf—in theory—but are never accepted as leaders in their own right.

3

Alphas and Betas, as the leaders of a pack, are always an alpha wolf and beta wolf in designation. There can be many alphas and beta designations within a pack, but only two wolves carry the title.

It's enough to make a human's head spin, but it all makes sense once you're living within a pack, as I am.

With all that said—it is rare to ever produce offspring of higher designation than the parents, though it isn't uncommon for them to be of lower strength. So, two betas can't make an alpha. And two omegas can't make a beta. At least, that's the general rule.

4

So, in order to have a Lycan Prince—the Lycan King needs an heir.

Though, if one were to ask what happens when a Lycan King dies without one—well, I have no idea. I don't pay much attention to the Lycan court. I'm struggling enough to live in a wolf pack as a human.

"That's enough for today. Clear out!"

The overseeing wolf's bark cuts through the humid evening air. My shoulders sag with relief, the weight of exhaustion settling deep in my bones. I drop the shovel, my blistered hands screaming in protest as I flex my fingers.

Sweat and dirt cake my skin, mingling with streaks of blood from the cuts littering my arms. Each step sends jolts of pain through my feet.

There are numerous blisters rubbing raw against the inside of my ill-fitting shoes. The thought of the long walk back to the omega lodge makes me want to curl up right here in the torn-up garden.

3

But if I do that, I'll be free game to any of my tormenters passing by. While there's no one who will protect me at the omega lodge, at least I have a room to hide in.

I force myself to move, one agonizing step after another. The pack bustles around me, their excited chatter about the Lycan King's impending visit grating on my nerves. To them, it's a momentous occasion. I'm sure the she-wolves who didn't find their mates during the Mate Hunt are primping and prepping in hopes of becoming a Lycan Queen. None of them seem to care about the widespread rumor that he killed his last mate.

But to me, this chatter is just another reminder of how I don't belong.

My stomach growls, a painful reminder that I've had nothing but a single glass of water while doing manual labor. The thirst is almost worse than the hunger, my throat dry and scratchy.

As I trudge along the darkening path, my mind wanders to the Lycan King's arrival. Where will I hide? The omega lodge is out of the question—it'll be crawling with visiting wolves. My old room in Alpha's house is no longer an option.

A bitter laugh tears at my dry throat. Life in the wolf pack sucks.

I can't stay here forever. It's impossible. Living here as a human is too dangerous.

The omega lodge looms ahead, a dingy silhouette against the night sky. No warm lights welcome me, no comforting scents of home-cooked meals. Just the acrid stench of unwashed bodies and stale air.

Some omegas don't keep themselves clean. Wolves are usually pretty finicky about their hygiene, but those at the bottom of the pack don't always care about it.

I slip inside, praying I can make it to the showers without—

"Well, well. Look what the cat dragged in."

Margo's sneering voice stops me in my tracks. She's standing in the darkness, her eyes glinting in the dim light. "You smell terrible. Are you covered in dirt? Don't even think about tracking that filth through here."

I bite back a retort. Arguing will only make things worse. "I just need to shower and sleep."

"There's no time to sleep. The kitchens need scrubbing before the Lycan King arrives. Can't have any human stink offending his royal nose, can we?"

My heart sinks. "But I haven't eaten—"

"Not my problem." Margo's dismissiveness is cold. "Now get moving."

1

I shuffle towards the kitchen, my body screaming in protest. The thought of hours of more work makes me want to cry.

The kitchen is a disaster zone. Pots and pans piled high, counters sticky with spills, floors caked with who-knows-what.

It's clear no one's done a thing while I wasn't around.

I grab a sponge and get to work, trying to ignore the gnawing emptiness in my stomach.

1

As I scrub, my mind drifts back to the Lycan King's last visit. I was barely thirteen, peeking through the curtains as sleek black cars rolled up the driveway. The wolves that emerged were nothing like our pack. They moved with a fluid grace that spoke of power beyond anything I'd ever seen.

One of them—a tall, imposing figure with eyes that seemed to glow—had looked right at my window. I'd ducked away, heart pounding, Alpha's warnings ringing in my ears.

4

Now, years later, the thought of facing those wolves without even the illusion of Alpha's protection sends a chill down my spine. Where can I possibly hide? Alpha always told me to stay hidden during their visit. They hate humans.

1

My arms ache as I attack a particularly stubborn stain. Maybe I could sneak into one of the unused storage sheds on the outskirts of pack territory. It would be cramped and uncomfortable, but at least I'd be out of sight.

For some reason, as I clean the kitchen from top to bottom, my arms and back screaming with the effort, I can't shake the feeling of those glowing eyes looking my way.