

GRACE OF A WOLF

Chapter 253: Grace: Facts Aren't Facting

Curling up in the trunk of a broken down car is not my idea of fun.

On a scale of one to ten, I'm pretty sure we're deep in the negatives. Times two. Squared. Or something.

Wait. If we multiply negative numbers—okay. Scratch that. Math isn't my strong suit. Whatever. The point is, I'm so damn far down the negative rabbit hole I've devolved into dreaming of twisting Andrew's head until it pops off and flies away like a deflating balloon, complete with all the spitty-farty sounds and background laugh tracks.

I fucking hate laugh tracks.

Anyway.

The point is, obviously, it wasn't my idea to get into this damn hole of darkness.

And if I want to be fair—which I don't—it isn't exactly Andrew's fault, either. Precisely. Kind of.

In fact, I'm not entirely certain how it happened.

One second there was a cat. Then I was trying to call Caine to save our sorry asses. Then Andrew got all squirrely—which wolves, by the way, do very well when they're antsy pantsy anxious—and suddenly there was a yowl, Andrew swearing, the trunk popping open somehow, then Andrew fell on me, I fell into the trunk, and the next thing I knew it was dark.

Oh, and Andrew's lost his keys. Which is why my homicidal fantasies involve his poor neck getting twisted. Also, according to him, he stepped on the cat, which started the entire fiasco.

How do I know he's lost his keys?

Because he's swearing about it. His voice is pretty muffled from in here but he's crawling around under the car trying to find them before, and I quote, "Ellie and her goddamn lackeys get here."

Oh—did I mention my favorite nemesis is on her way?

Pretty sure whatever god is in charge of luck hates me.

If I had my phone, I'd complain to someone. But I don't. Because, you know, I fell, and it fell, and... yes.

So I'm stuck in the darkness of a trunk that smells strangely like sweaty feet and sardines, hoping a certain Luna doesn't come to murder me in plain sight, wondering where the fuck Andrew lost his keys when he had them only minutes before.

Oh, and the coin? It's not burning anymore.

Again, not great at math, but if I add it all up, I'm guessing all this bad luck has *something* to do with it. And the whole time being rewound shebang. And—

"Found it," I hear Andrew mumble, which sounds strangely subdued for such a great moment.

"You found them?"

"What?"

"Did you find them?" I raise my voice to fight the blockade of metal and whatever weird scratchy fabric people line cars with.

"No, I said, 'oh, shit.'"

He sounds strangely calm.

"Why are we oh shitting?" I figure it can't be terrible considering he isn't in a panic.

"Ellie's here."

Okay, I'm wrong. Again, bad at math. Or the facts aren't facting.

Seriously, being in a trunk sucks. I can't see anything, hear anything properly, or—you know—run for my life.

Now I know what a sitting duck feels like.

I'm not panicking.

I'm *not* panicking.

My heart's just trying to beat its way out of my ribcage like some demented drummer who missed every class on rhythm. Totally normal. Completely fine. Yep. Nothing to—

The car goes ballistic.

I shriek.

Can't help it. The whole damn vehicle shakes like someone just drop-kicked it, and metal groans above me like a tortured banshee as my stomach lurches sideways, ready to ditch my body for greener pastures.

"What the f—"

Light floods in.

I blink against the sudden brightness, spots dancing across my vision as Andrew's hand clamps around my wrist and yanks me out without a warning or quick check to make sure I'm, you know, sane. Which I'm not.

His chivalrous brute force has me stumbling out of the trunk on newborn giraffe legs, and I groan, completely forgetting the urgency of the moment. "Ow, Jesus, Mary, and Santa's little elves, couldn't you be a little—"

"Move."

Andrew yanks again, this time forcing me upright, and I finally get my bearings enough to see what the hell is going on.

I regret it immediately.

Ellie's goons are everywhere.

At least twenty of them, all shifted, all snarling, all facing off against—

"Fenris?" I blink a few times, but nope, he's still there.

The massive black wolf stands between us and the pack, hackles raised, lips pulled back to reveal teeth that look like they could bite through steel. His ethereal blue glow pulses bright and vivid even in the daylight, making him look more otherworldly than usual.

Wait.

Twenty wolves? Thirty? Math might not be my strong suit, but...

I count again, squinting past the sea of fur and fangs. Yeah. Definitely more than before. Way more. Like, tripled.

How the hell—

Oh.

Time rewind.

But if time rewound, shouldn't there still be the same number? Unless... unless something changed. Unless me having that stupid coin in my pocket when it rewound screwed with the timeline or—

"Grace, get down!"

Andrew tackles me sideways as one of the wolves lunges. Fenris intercepts mid-air, his massive bigger-than-life jaws snapping around the wolf's throat before flinging it away like a ragdoll.

I hit the ground hard, gravel biting into my palms as Andrew scrambles back up.

"How is Fenris even here?" I gasp, trying to catch my breath.

Stupid question, really. Obviously Caine sent him. Obviously Caine was worried about me and told his giant murder wolf to keep tabs on me.

Never thought I'd love a murder wolf so much.

Seriously, he's the best. Kill them all.

But.

But.

Why wasn't he here before? Before time rewound?

My mind keeps sticking on that point until a snarl rips through the air, cutting off my circular thought process.

The wolves attack all at once, like a coordinated strike as they rush Fenris from every angle. He's a blur of black fur and glowing energy, teeth flashing as he tears into the first wave. Blood sprays. Wolves yelp. One goes flying through the air and crashes into a tree with a sickening crack.

For someone who once refused to even look at Caine because she considered him a murderer, I'm staring in way too much awe now, plus a smidgen of panic as one of them snaps his yellowed teeth a little too close to his haunches.

My hand shoots out on instinct, reaching toward Fenris like I can somehow—

Pain explodes across my knuckles, like someone just slapped my hand with a ruler at full force.

"Ow, what the *fuck*—"

I jerk my arm back, cradling my hand against my chest as a too-familiar *ding* goes off from somewhere nearby.

Andrew fumbles in his pocket, yanking something out without looking away from the fight.

"Here."

He shoves my phone at me, eyes locked on Fenris as the giant wolf lunges for another attacker.

My hand throbs.

I glance down at my phone, fingers still tingling from whatever the hell just happened, and am somehow (am I getting used to this now?) unsurprised to see a flash of a notification from a certain App.

[CAERIEL: No.]

That's it.

Super fucking helpful. The *no* could mean anything, but somehow I'm pretty sure he's the ruler-wielding asshole who just smacked my hand from who-knows-where.

I look up, and for the first time my eyes slide past all the furry fighting wolves to someone standing at the back of the pack, still in human form and looking as if she's been dragged through a hedge backward. Twice.

It's Ellie. (Shocker.)

No, really, it is kind of a shocker. Seriously, she looks... deranged.

Her hair's a tangled mess, dirt's streaked across her face, and her eyes—

Goddess.

Her eyes look wrong.

