

GRACE OF A WOLF

Chapter 254

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Sharp pains jab into my upper arm as Andrew spins me around and shoves me forward (which is now technically backward, but that's a minor detail I have no business obsessing over in this moment of urgency).

"Get out of here," he grits out, not even looking my way. He's still staring in the direction of Fenris and the stupid wolves Ellie's brought with her to kill us all.

"But—" The last time he had me run, he was in danger. Granted, Fenris is here to be on his side and my favorite murder wolf makes a huge difference, no pun intended.

"They aren't pack," he snaps. "Get out of here!"

Aren't pack?

My head swirls as I try to turn back around, but this time Andrew shoves me so hard I stumble a few steps forward and almost fall to my knees.

"Then who—"

"Just get out of here!"

Heart: Stay and die defending your friends.

Brain: Shut up and listen to the man.

Damn it. I'm worse than no help—I'm a walking, talking, breathing, useless liability who, by the way, is Ellie's prime target.

I stop hesitating and lurch forward a few ungainly steps, unsurprised when something tiny burns the shit out of my thigh.

A thunderous boom comes from behind and launches me forward like a giant slap from the hand of God. Gravity helps slam me face-first into the ground, and I'm pretty sure my teeth rip through the skin beneath my lip as the tangy flavor of blood becomes one of the only sensations I can reliably focus on.

My ears ring and buzz, like a bee's vibrating inside of them, and my sight's filled with strange prismatic shapes I'm forced to blink away. Did I look at the explosion while it was happening? I must have, but those few microseconds are a complete blur.

"Ugh!"

I push myself up, spitting blood to the ground as I rapid-fire blink my eyes to see properly again.

But when I look back, not only is there no sign of some sort of bomb going off—they're all gone.

No Andrew. No Fenris. No bunch of murderous non-pack wolves.

Okay, they're not *all* gone.

Ellie's still here.

She's walking slowly in my direction, maybe thirty feet away now. Her clothes hang in tatters, magically hiding anything important while still looking very much like she's been held captive by a rabid wolverine for a few months.

Her eyes have a wild, unfocused quality as they meet mine, making me shudder.

She takes a step toward me. Then another.

I force myself to breathe, trying to ignore my unnaturally quick heartbeat.

"Hey, Ellie. How's it going?"

The moment the words leave my mouth, I mentally kick myself. How's it going? Really? That's what I lead with when facing someone who tried to murder me? Then again, I'm dating Caine now, and he once enjoyed having his hand around my throat, so maybe I'm just naturally drawn to people who want me dead.

But, if I need to specify—and I feel a sudden urge to—he definitely doesn't want me dead, so it's an unfair comparison.

Ellie doesn't respond immediately, but she does take another few steady steps, and I take a few back, trying to maintain the distance between us. Silly. It's impossible for a human to outrun a shifter, especially one as high-class as her.

Then she snarls, her features twisting into something strangely lupine on her human face. Almost like she's beginning to shift. Danger bells ring a little harder in my head.

"What the hell did you do to me?"

I take a step back, then another, as her fingers stiffen and flex by her sides. "I didn't do anything to you."

"Liar. You did it to Rafe, too, you crazy human bitch."

Oookay.

Ellie's officially lost all her marbles.

"I don't know what you're talking about, but I definitely haven't done anything to you. Or Rafe."

"Don't say his name!"

The coin burns hotter in my pocket. My eyes dart around the street, unsurprised to see no signs of life anywhere. It's like we're in a ghost town.

"Sorry, Ellie, but I don't know what you're talking about."

She laughs, a strangely broken sound, filled with a couple sides of hysteria. "It's you. It has to be you. This is why humans don't belong in a pack. I should have killed you a long time ago."

My heel hits a curb and I fall onto my ass on the sidewalk, watching as the deranged woman in front of me gets ever closer.

"Why don't you explain what I did?" Maybe if she talks, she won't use her claws. Which are definitely out and sharp and twitching at her sides.

"This," she hisses, swiping an arm out to the side to gesture at nothing. "All of this. Everything. How many more times do I have to kill you before it finally sticks?"

I blink, caught off guard by her words. "How... many times have you killed me?"

"Ten? Eleven? I've started to lose count." She giggles, but it isn't a particularly mirthful sound. "But it always starts over. Every time."

The burning coin in my pocket zaps me through my pants, and I scramble back as she continues to head for me, wincing at the pain in my leg. Then I pause. "Wait. You're saying time's started over for you?"

"Time, time, time." Her words take on a strange, sing-song lilt. "I've never hated time so much. Will it go back to normal this time? Maybe if I cut off your head."

What the fuck.

What the *fuck*.

Okay, on one hand, I need to run. Like, now. But my legs are all soft and wobbly and my brain's circling around all the shit she's spewing and—

"Wait, so you remember what happened before, too?"

Her foot freezes mid-air, one of her grotesque clawed hands pointed in my direction. Then she slowly straightens, carefully straightening her leg as she cocks her head to the side, assessing me in the strange, totally bonkers way she's developed. "Oh. This time you do, too?"

Fuck.

"How did you kill me last time?"