

Grace of a Wolf - Chapter 261: Caine: Saved!

(3)[1,268 words]

CAINE

Where the fuck is she?

Fenris has already done his job. Bodies litter the ground in various states of conscious or unconscious, bleeding and broken, but generously kept alive. For now.

My wolf stands by them, no longer oversized, his ethereal blue glow brighter than usual. He appears calm at first glance, but the erratic snarling in the back of my head says otherwise.

He's as crazed as I am.

Grace isn't here.

Andrew staggers to his feet with my arrival, covered in dirt and blood, both his and not. He's alive, breathing, and *here*. But she isn't.

My hand closes around his throat before I register moving. I lift him off the ground with a growl. "Where is Grace?"

To his credit, the beta doesn't struggle against my grip, even as his windpipe compresses.

"Gone," he rasps. "One second she was there. Next—"

"*Gone?*" The word comes out more animal than human. "You let her disappear right in front of you?"

Caine. Fenris's voice cuts through my rage. *Put the pup down. He's not your enemy.*

I bare my teeth as my eyes continue to bore into Andrew's. "He let her—"

We both did. Fenris stalks toward us, huffing and growling as his muzzle sweeps from left to right, constantly filtering for our mate's scent. *If you need to hit something, I've left you plenty of options. They're still breathing. Barely.*

My grip tightens on Andrew's throat. He wheezes but stares at me with steady brown eyes, like a loyal dog waiting for its master to stop kicking.

Damn it.

I release him. He drops, catches himself on one knee, and rubs his throat without complaint.

"She was right there," he says, after a few coughs. "Then she just... wasn't. Ellie disappeared, too. No one saw it happen. There's no scent trail, nothing to follow. And no one can link with Ellie."

Ellie, that damned Luna stalking Grace like prey. My fingers flex in frustration; if anyone deserves to be killed here, it's her. Letting her live was a mistake, one I won't make again.

Even if I have to do it behind my soft-hearted mate's back.

I turn to the wolves Fenris has incapacitated. "You," I snap, pointing at the nearest one. He has a shattered leg, trying to drag himself away. "Where did your Luna take her?"

He shakes his head frantically, his fear sour in the air. "We don't know, High Alpha!"

I flood my voice with alpha pressure. "Answer me."

"I don't know!" His voice goes strained and high-pitched. "Luna Ellie said the human did something to her. Now they're both gone!"

"Did something," I repeat flatly. "What things could a weak human like Grace do to your Luna?"

"I don't know! I swear, I don't know anything!"

I look to the next wolf, then the next. Same story. Same ignorance.

They're useless, Fenris snarls, pacing the street where Grace apparently disappeared. *None of them know anything.*

"Then none of them need to live."

Andrew's head snaps up. "Wait—"

"They attacked my mate!" I roar, ready to grab him by the throat again.

But, contrary to expectation, Andrew shakes his head. "A death sentence is expected. Just don't do it here. If Grace comes back... She'll be frightened."

I hesitate. He has a point; the woman is extraordinarily soft-hearted.

Fenris grumbles. He isn't thrilled, either; letting them breathe even one more minute grates against our nerves.

But I nod anyway. "Take them back. They'll be dealt with after we find her."

A strange sound rends the air, like tearing paper, only far too loud.

All of us swing in its direction, staring in the middle of the street where reality's torn open. Two figures tumble out of nothing.

Grace hits the ground hard, rolling twice before coming to a stop on her side. She's clutching something black and furry to her chest—a cat, of all things, because the woman seems to be a pet magnet—and she looks like absolute hell. Blood's crusted on the corner of her mouth. Dirt's all over her face. Her clothes are torn.

But it's Grace.

A strangely frozen Ellie lands beside her, her face twisted into an expression of fury.

I'm at Grace's side before my brain catches up with my body. My hands find her shoulders, her face, her arms, checking for injuries with a desperation bordering on pathetic.

"Grace." Her name comes out rough, but my hands are gentle as they ghost over every inch of her. "Look at me."

Her grass-green eyes focus on mine, dazed and slightly glassy. "Caine?"

"I'm here." I cup her face, tilting it toward me to examine the blood on her lip. "What happened? Where did you go? Are you hurt?"

"I'm—" She winces as I probe a bruise forming on her cheekbone. "Ow. I'm okay. Mostly. I think."

"You *think*?" My voice rises despite my efforts to control it. "You disappeared into thin air. You were *gone*. We couldn't feel you, couldn't sense you, couldn't—"

But then I bite back the rest of the words, breathing out hard instead. Grace doesn't do well with yelling.

Fenris seems surprised. *You have restraint?* he asks skeptically.

"It's a long story." She struggles to stand, and I grab her beneath her arms, lifting her slender body with ease. The cat in her arms jumps to the ground with an irritated yowl, tail swishing as it saunters off.

As if we needed another cat.

Grace watches it go with a strange expression, before turning back to me and repeating, "Really long story. Involves time loops and—" Her gaze slides past me to Ellie's frozen form. "She's alive, right?"

I don't even glance back, barely registering the strange explanation. "She's breathing." Unfortunately.

"Oh, good. I think." My mate rubs at her forehead with a sigh. "What a mess. I'm not sure how long she'll be frozen like that, so you should tie her up."

"Andrew," I snap, still not letting my eyes off her.

"On it."

Fenris bumps behind her knees, rubbing his head over her thigh with a soft whine.

She smells strange, he points out, but I don't care. There's still the scent of Grace surrounding me, blueberry-sweet and perfect. All the rest can wait to be detailed later.

"There was Chaos and—magic wasn't... it hurt and—wait, what are you doing?"

My hands continue their frantic inventory of Grace's injuries. Scrapes. Bruises. Dried blood under her fingernails; hers.

"Checking to make sure you're okay."

"I'm fine." She shoves at my hands, then wraps her arms around my waist with a long sigh. "Thank God I'm back."

I nod, glowering at Fenris as he continues to lean against her.

What? You aren't the only one who missed her.

She reaches down to rub his ears, but I grab her arm and return it to my waist with a scowl. "Don't worry about Fenris."

"But he—"

"Just focus on me, Grace."

You can't hog our mate, Fenris mutters. How childish.

I shoot him a quick glare. *Go deal with our walking dead before she notices them.*

If a wolf could roll their eyes, he definitely would be doing so. Instead, he huffs and leans harder against the back of Grace's thighs. *I don't have hands. Maybe you should do it.*

There's no way in hell I'm leaving the woman behind, not even for a second. She's a magnet for trouble; what if I turn around and she's disappeared again, into another strange worldly tear?

No; Grace is going to have to stay by my side at every second.

Good luck with that, Fenris mutters. Then, after a second of thought, I'll help.

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