

Grace of a Wolf Chapter 9 - Grace: Unwelcome Advances

Chapter 9: Grace: Unwelcome Advances

I have to leave the pack.

This realization is a long time coming, but when I wake up to Rafe's face staring down at me, in the relative safety of *my own room*, it's a decision made for me.

5

I'm not safe anywhere. Not even where I sleep.

"Don't shout," he whispers, placing a hand over my mouth.

I wasn't going to, anyway. No one would come to my aid here.

My nod seems to relieve him, because he lets me go and sits on my bed without asking for permission.

I sit up, my fingers clutching the blanket and pulling it over my chest. The thin fabric offers little protection, but it's all I have against Rafe's piercing blue gaze. I'm still wearing my clothes from yesterday, but being in my bed—in my room—leaves me feeling vulnerable.

My heart pounds, a traitorous rhythm that threatens to betray my resolve.

"What are you doing here?"

Rafe's sun-bright hair catches the dim light, a halo around his perfect features. His blue eyes, once a source of comfort, now make my stomach twist.

All I can see is how he dumped me for Ellie the moment he realized they were mates.

"How are you doing, Grace?"

His hand reaches for mine. I flinch away, pressing myself against the headboard.

9

"What are you doing here?" The words come out sharper this time.

Rafe's shoulders slump, and he runs a hand through his hair, mussing the perfect strands. "I'm worried about you."

A harsh laugh escapes my lips before I can stop it. "That's rich."

"I mean it, Grace. I care about you."

"You have a funny way of showing it."

His sad facade fades as his jaw clenches. There's a tick beneath his skin, a twitching that only serves to remind me he's changed. Like a personality transplant. Or, worse—I never knew him at all. "It's complicated."

"No, it's not. You chose her. You made that perfectly clear."

There's a flash of amber bleeding into the blue of his eyes. My lack of submission must anger his wolf, too. "It's not that simple. The mate bond—"

"Save it." I cut him off, wishing my words came out with more scorn and less trembling. "I don't want to hear about your precious mate bond."

Rafe leans forward, his scent washing over me. Trees and earth and everything I once called home. "Grace, please. I never meant to hurt you."

"But you did." The words hang between us, heavy and undeniable. Making me sound way too fragile.

He reaches for me again, and this time I let him take my hand. His touch sends sparks racing up my arm, and I hate myself for the way my body responds to him.

"I miss you," he whispers.

7

For a moment, I let myself believe him. Let myself imagine a world where we could go back to the way things were. But then I remember Ellie's cruel smile. His indifference in the forest, when I was near-naked and terrified. And how impossible it is for me to remain in this abusive pack.

2

I pull my hand away. "You don't get to miss me. You don't get to come in here and act like you care."

"I do care!" Rafe's voice rises, and I flinch. He takes a deep breath, visibly trying to calm himself. "I know things are different now, but that doesn't mean I've stopped caring about you."

"Different?" The word is so fucking pathetic for this situation, leaving me with no way to express how I feel. So I laugh. A brittle, sharp, broken sound. "Like how your new mate treats me like dirt? How the entire pack looks at me like I'm nothing?"

Rafe's face twists into something ugly, before it smooths out again. He leans forward, grabbing my hand and holding tight, not letting me go. "I'll talk to Ellie. I'll make sure she treats you better."

"You don't get it, do you?" I shake my head, disbelief coursing through me. "It's not just about how Ellie treats me. It's about how you let her treat me. How you stand by and watch while I'm humiliated and abused."

"I can't go against my mate, Grace. You know that."

1

"Then why are you here?" I demand, anger finally overtaking the hurt. "What do you want from me?"

1

Rafe's eyes darken, and suddenly he's too close. His hand cups my cheek, and I hate the way I lean into his touch. Like a bad fucking habit. "I want you," he breathes.

11

For a heartbeat, I'm tempted. To give in, to let him kiss me, to pretend that nothing has changed. It would be so much easier.

I hate him.

But I miss him. So much.

He was my everything. I dreamed of a future with him. I loved him.

I shove him away, scrambling out of bed. "Get out."

"Grace—"

"No." I stand tall, even as my legs shake beneath me. The temptation of the familiar is terrifying. "You don't get to have both of us. You made your choice, Rafe. Now live with it."

3

His face hardens, that alpha presence I once found so attractive now feeling oppressive. "You're mine, Grace. You've always been mine."

10

"Yours?" It's amazing how much my heart hurts. Again. "No, I'm not. I'm human, remember? I don't belong to this pack, and I certainly don't belong to you."

Rafe stands, towering over me. His eyes blaze with amber fire; his wolf is fighting for control. He steps forward, and I step back, only for the wall to hit my back.

"You *are* mine," he insists, resting a hand on the wall beside my head. "You're just angry with me. It's okay, Gracie. I understand. I get it. I hurt you."

4

He lifts a hand, brushing it against my jaw in a whisper-soft caress that has my stomach churning.

This is not the Rafe I loved.

He wasn't stupid like this. He cared about my feelings. My thoughts. He wanted me to be true to myself. He loved me for me.

He didn't ever claim to own me.

"Please leave." My demands downgrade to pleas. "I just want to be left alone. If Ellie finds out you're here—"

"She won't find out," he breathes, his eyes drawn to my lips. "We'll keep it quiet. I promise I won't let you get hurt, Grace."

4

"Rafe, she's not stupid. She'll know—"

He swoops in to kiss me, but I get my hand between our lips just in time. My heart races at the anger darkening his eyes, even as his hand strokes my cheek in a gentle caress. "It's okay, Gracie. I'll make it okay. We can still be together in the end. I know I said things that hurt you, but it was all in the hunting haze."

8

He presses his lips against my hand, in soft, sensual kisses that only make my skin crawl.

"I made a mistake, Grace. But I'm going to get you back. You'll see. You were meant for me."

26

* * *

Rafe eventually leaves.

And I shower, because his touch leaves me feeling filthy.

2

Which, of course, means Margo screams at me for being a filthy laze-about, then sends me back to the main lodge to continue work on the garden, despite having had only a couple hours of sleep.

In short? Rafe ruined my entire day, all to steal a few kisses behind his precious mate's back.

Instead of heading to the garden, like Margo demands, I sneak back into my room to pack the few things I now have. But a girl needs clothes. And shoes that fit. And food.

Those aren't in my room.

The kitchen is too busy, so I can't steal food from there. But there's a mini pantry on each floor, filled with simple things like graham crackers, water bottles, and beef jerky.

I've stolen a few things from them before, but Margo caught me with empty wrappers on the first day. I never tried to take snacks again.

This time? I don't care. I have a large backpack (which, I admit, I stole from someone's room) and I fill it with as much as I can. There's even a machete (also stolen from someone's room). I do have to sneak around to avoid Margo, but I score a pair of shoes (yes, stolen from someone's room). They fit better than what I was given... because they're *my* shoes, given away to a random omega, all to show me how little I mean to the pack.

1

My heart pounds against my ribs as I slip out of the omega lodge. The weight of the stolen backpack feels like an anchor, threatening to drag me back into the hell I'm desperate to escape. Each step away from the building sends a jolt of adrenaline through my veins.

Surely someone will stop me. A hand will grab my shoulder, or Margo's shrill voice will cut through the air. But nothing happens.

The forest looms ahead.

I don't bother trying to hide my trail. What's the point? They're wolves. They'll catch my scent no matter what I do. Instead, I stick to the well-worn path, my stolen shoes—*my shoes*—carrying me deeper into the forest.

The plan, if you can call it that, is simple. Follow the trail until I reach the river, then use the water to mask my scent. It's not foolproof, but it's all I've got. My real hope lies in the chaos back at the pack. With the Lycan King's impending arrival, maybe they won't notice I'm gone until it's too late.

Leaving is an impulsive decision, obviously. But I can't stay.

I'll die there. Either from a jealous mate, or overwork, or unchecked bullying by angry wolves. And, if Rafe doesn't stop whatever delusions he's on, I'm going to end up violated with more than a stolen kiss.

5

The forest air fills my lungs, crisp and clean. It should feel like freedom, but all I taste is fear. What am I doing? Where am I going? The questions swirl in my mind, threatening to overwhelm me.

No money. No real plan. Just a backpack full of stolen goods and a desperate need to escape. The thought of finding some sort of help in the city is a thin thread of hope I cling to.

1

The trail winds through the trees, familiar yet suddenly alien. How many times had I walked this path with Rafe? The memory of his touch, once comforting, now makes my skin crawl. I push the thought away, focusing on the sound of my footsteps and the rustle of leaves overhead.

A twig snaps somewhere to my left. I freeze, my heart leaping into my throat. Is this it? Have they found me already? I strain my ears, listening for the telltale sound of wolf paws on forest floor.

Nothing.

Just a squirrel, scampering up a nearby tree. I let out a shaky breath, forcing my legs to move again.

2